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Mrs Drewe

Fra. Francis

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DEAD-SEA FRUIT

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,"

ETC., ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

FIFTH EDITION.

LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

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DEAD-SEA FRUIT.

CHAPTER I.

QUITE ALONE.

The marble image of Hubert Van Eyck stood out against the warm blue sky, and cast a slanting shadow across the sunlit flags. The July afternoon was drawing to a close. Low sunlight shone golden on the canals of Ville-brumeuse, and changed every westward-looking window into a casement of gold. Those are no common windows which look out upon the quiet streets and lonely squares of that sleepy Belgian city. No handiwork of modern speculative builder is visible amid that grand old architecture — no flimsy nineteenth-century villa perks its tawdry head among those mediæval splendours—no upstart semi-detached

abominations of spurious Gothic, picked out with rainbow-coloured brick, affright the eye by their hideous aspect. To live in Villebrumeuse is to live in the sixteenth century. A quiet calm, as of the past, pervades the shady streets. Green trees reflect themselves in the still waters of the slow canal which creeps athwart the city; and by the side of the tranquil waters there are pleasant walks o'ershadowed by the umbrage of limes, and wooden benches whereon the peaceful citizens may repose themselves in the evening dusk. In despite of its solemn tranquillity, this Villebrumeuse is not a dreary dwelling-place. If it has drifted from amidst the busy places of this earth—if the blustrous ocean of modern progress has receded from its shores, leaving it far away across a level waste of reef and sand—this quiet city has, at the worst, been left stationary, while the noisy tide sweeps on with all its tumult of success and failure—its prosperous ventures and forgotten wrecks. The peace which pervades Villebrumeuse is the tranquillity

of slumber, and not the awful stillness of death. There is a jog-trot prosperity in the place, a comfortable air, which is soothing to the world-worn spirit; but the wrestling, and scuffling, and striving, and struggling of modern commerce is unknown among the quiet merchants, who content themselves with supplying the simple wants of their fellow-citizens in the simplest fashion. And yet this city was once a mart to which the Orient brought her richest merchandise; and in the days gone by, these quaint old squares have been clamorous with the voices of many traders, and bright with the holiday raiment of busy multitudes.

A young Englishman walked slowly up and down the broad flagged square, across which the painter's statue cast its sombre shadow. He was teacher of English and mathematics in a great public academy near at hand, and his name was Eustace Thorburn. For three years he had held his post in the Villebrumeuse academy; for three years he had done his duty, quietly and earnestly, to the satisfaction

of every one concerned in the performance. And yet he was something of an enthusiast, and something of a poet, and possessed many of those attributes which are commonly supposed to constitute a letter of license for the neglect of vulgar every-day duties.

That was an ardent and an ambitious spirit which shone out of Eustace Thorburn's gray eyes; but if the fiery sword had chafed the scabbard a little during three years of academical routine and Villebrumeuse monotony, the young man had been patient and contented withal. There was a public library in Villebrumeuse to which the tutor had free entrance, and in the mediæval chambers of this institution his leisure had been spent. That dreamy idleness amongst good books had been very pleasant to him; his work in the academy was endurable, despite its tedious and laborious nature; and he had a lurking tenderness for the quaint old city, the slow canals overshadowed by green trees, the simple people, and the old-world customs. Thus, if there were times when the

eager spirit would fain have soared to loftier and fairer regions, the young student and teacher had not been altogether unhappy since his destiny had brought him to this place to earn his bread amongst strangers.

Amongst strangers? Were the inhabitants of this Belgian city any more strange to him than all the other inhabitants of this populous earth—except the one man and woman who made the sum-total of his kindred and friends? Amongst strangers? Why, if the statue of Van Eyck could have descended from yonder pedestal, to walk in the streets of the city, the animated effigy could scarcely have been a lonelier creature than the young man who passed to and fro athwart the sloping shadow on the flags this July afternoon.

Looking backward, through the shadows of the past, how many of those images, familiar to most men, were wanting in the mystic pictures that memory presented to Eustace Thorburn! Memory, let him question her never so

closely, could not show him any faint tracing of a father's face flickering dimly athwart the half-consciousness of infancy. Nor could he, in surveying the events of his childhood, recall so much as one visit to a father's grave, one accidental utterance of a father's name, one object, however trivial, associated with a father's existence—a picture, a sword, a book, a watch, a tress of hair. The time had been when he had been wont to question his mother about this missing father; but that was long ago. The time had come, and too quickly in this young man's life, when a precocious wisdom had checked his questioning, and he had learned to refrain from all reference to a father's name, as the one subject, of all others, most scrupulously to be avoided by his lips. He was twenty-three years of age, and he had never been told his father's name or position in the world. For the last ten years of his life it had been a common thing for him to lie awake in the solemn quiet of the night, thinking of that unknown father, and wondering whether he were

alive or dead. He knew that he had no claim to the name which he bore, and that he had as good a right to call himself a Guelph or a Plantagenet as he had to call himself Thorburn.

How many childless men upon this earth would have been glad to call Eustace Thorburn son! How many of this world's magnates, with mighty names to transmit, would have rejoiced with unspeakable rapture, could they have set the joy-bells ringing for the coming of age of such an heir! As there are rare and peerless flowers that adorn inaccessible regions where no hand can gather them, where no eye may delight in their loveliness, so there are friendless creatures in the world who might make the joy of empty hearts, and be the pride of desolate households. The "something in this world amiss," which the poet has sung of, pervades every social relation. The plaintive wailing of the minor mingles itself with every earthly melody; and it is only by and by that the veil shall be lifted; it is only by and by that the mystic enigma shall be unriddled, and

the full chords of perfect harmony peal on our ears, unmarred by that undertone of pain.

Not often has a nobler face looked upward to the countenance of the statue than that which looked at it with a dreamy gaze to-day. The face of the young man was, like the face of the statue, more beautiful by reason of its nobility of expression than because of its perfect regularity of feature. In Eustace Thorburn's countenance the intellectual radiance so far surpassed the physical beauty, that those who looked at him for the first time were impressed chiefly by the brightness of his expression, and were likely to take their leave of him in complete ignorance as to the shape of his nose or the modelling of his mouth.

It is but a thankless task to catalogue such a face ; the dark gray eyes which pass for black ; the mobile mouth which, in one moment, seems formed to express an unbending pride and an indomitable will, and in the next will wreathe itself into such a smile that it must needs appear incapable of any expression but manly

tenderness or playful humour; the loosely arranged auburn hair, which gives something of a leonine aspect to the lofty head; the complexion of almost womanly fairness, with a rich glow that comes and goes with every changing impulse or emotion—all these go such a little way towards the individuality of the young Englishman, walking up and down the lonely square during his half-hour's respite from the monotonous duties of the afternoon.

This half-hour's holiday was not Mr. Thorburn's only privilege. He had two hours in every day for his own studies—two hours which he generally spent in the public library, for his ambition had shaped itself into a palpable form, and had mapped the outline of a career. He was to be a man of letters. If he had been a rich man, he would have shut himself in his library and made himself a poet. But as he was nothing but a nameless and penniless stripling, with his bread to earn, he had no right to indulge in the luxury of verse-making. The wide arena of literary labour lay before him,

and he had no choice but to force his way into the lists, and fight for any place that might happen to be vacant. Fate might make of him what she would—journalist, novelist, dramatist, magazine hack, penny-a-liner: but she must use him very cruelly before she could quench the fire of his young ambition, or bend the crest with which he was prepared to confront the world.

He had selected for himself this profession of literature chiefly because it was the only calling which demanded no capital from the beginner, and a little because the only kinsman he had in the world was a man who lived by his pen, and who might have prospered and won distinction by means of that fluent pen, had he not chosen to do otherwise.

The half-hour's respite expired presently, and a great clanging bell in the academy near at hand summoned the pupils to their evening lesson. It was a summons for the master also, and Mr. Thorburn ran across the square and turned into the street on which one side of the

academy looked. He pushed open a little wooden door in the big gateway, and passed under the arched entrance; but before going to his class-room, he stopped to examine a rack in which letters addressed to the masters were wont to be kept. He rarely omitted to look at this rack, though he had very few correspondents, and only received about one letter in a fortnight. To-day there was a letter. His heart turned cold as he looked at it, for the envelope was bordered with black, and addressed in the hand of his mother's brother, who very seldom wrote to him. His mother had been an invalid for a long time, and such a letter as that could have but one fatal meaning. For months he had looked forward to his August holiday, which would enable him to go to England and spend a few happy weeks with that dear mother—and now the holiday would come too late.

He went out into one of the dismal playgrounds, a gravelled yard surrounded by high whitewashed walls, and read his letter.

His tears fell thick and fast upon the flimsy paper as he read. Ten minutes ago, walking to and fro in the sunshine, he had lamented his loneliness, remembering that he had only two friends in the world. He knew now that the dearer of these two was lost to him. The letter told him of his mother's death.

"There is no need for you to hurry back, my poor lad," wrote his uncle. "The funeral is to take place to-morrow, and will be over when you get this letter. I saw your mother a fortnight before her death, and she then told me what she could never find the courage to tell you—that the end was very near. It came suddenly at the last, and I was out of the way at the time; but they tell me it was a calm and holy ending. Her last words were of you. She dwelt much on your goodness and devotion, Mrs. Bane tells me. The last two days were spent in prayer, poor innocent soul; and I, who stand in so much greater need of that kind of thing, can't bring myself to it for half an hour! Poor soul! Bane thinks it was for you she was

praying, she repeated your name so often—sometimes in her sleep, sometimes when she was lying in a languid state between sleeping and waking. But she did not wish you to be sent for. 'It is better that he should be away,' she said; 'I think he knew that this day must soon come.'

"And now, my dear boy, try to bear up against this sorrow like a brave, true-hearted lad, as you are. I say nothing of what I feel myself, for there are some things which come with a bad grace from certain people. You know that I loved my sister; though, God knows, *I* never knew how dearly till yesterday, when I saw the blinds down at Mrs. Bane's, and guessed what had happened. Remember, Eustace, that so long as I can earn a crust, my sister Celia's son shall be welcome to his share of it; and though I may be a disreputable acquaintance, I can be a faithful friend. If you are tired of that slow old Belgian city, come back to England. We will manage your establishment here somehow. The impracticable Daniel has a certain kind of

influence; and though he rarely cares to use it on his own account,—being so bad a lot that he dare not give himself a decent character,—he will employ it to the uttermost for a spotless nephew.

"Come, then, dear boy; a kind of heart-sickness has come over me, and I want to see the brightest face that I know in this world, and the only face that I love. Come, even if you must needs return to the whitewashed saloons of the Parthenée. There are letters and papers of your poor mother's which it might be well for you to destroy. My profane hand shall not tamper with them."

The young man thrust his kinsman's letter in his breast, and paced the playground slowly for some time, meditating the loss that had come upon him. In one of the big class-rooms near at hand his pupils were waiting for him; and there was wonderment and consternation at this delay in the most punctual of all the masters. His tears had dropped fast upon the

letter some time ago; but his eyes were dry now. The dull agony which filled his breast was rather a sense of desolation than a poignant grief. He had seen and known that his mother was fading from this troubled earth before his coming to Belgium; and poverty's bitterest penalty had been the necessity which had separated him from her. The shadow of this coming sorrow had long darkened the horizon of his young life. The sad reality had come upon him a little sooner than he had expected it, and that was all. He bowed his head, and resigned himself to this affliction; but there was something to which he could not resign himself, and that was the manner of his loss.

"Alone—in a hired lodging—with a poor, ill-paid, hard-working drudge for her sole companion and consoler! O mother, mother, you were too bright a creature for so sad a fate!"

And then there arose before this young man's eyes one of those pictures which were continually haunting him—the picture of what his life and his mother's life might have been, had

things been different with them. He fancied himself the beloved and acknowledged son of a good and honourable man; he fancied his mother a happy wife. Ah! then how changed all would have been! Sickness and death would have come all the same, perhaps, since there is no earthly barrier that can exclude those dark visitors from happy households. They would have come, the dreaded guests, but with how different an aspect! He made for himself the picture of two death-beds. By one there knelt a group of loving children, weeping silently for a dying mother, while a grief-stricken husband suppressed all outward evidence of his sorrow, lest he should trouble the departing spirit whose earthly tabernacle was supported by his fond arms. And the other death-bed! Alas, how sad the contrast between the two pictures! A woman lying alone in a dingy chamber, abandoned and forgotten by every creature in the world except her son, and even he away from her.

"And for this, as well as for all the rest, we have to thank *him!*" muttered the young man.

His face, which until now had been overshadowed only by a quiet despondency, darkened suddenly as he said this. It was not the first time he had apostrophized a nameless enemy in the same bitter spirit. He had very often abandoned himself to vengeful thoughts about this unknown foe, to whose evil-doing he attributed every sorrow of his own, and all those hidden griefs and silent agonies so patiently endured by his mother. He kept a close account of his mother's wrongs, and of his own, and he set them all against this person, whom he had never seen and whose name he might never discover.

This nameless enemy was his father.

CHAPTER II.

A RETROSPECTIVE SURVEY.

From the mediæval tranquillity of Villebrumeuse to the dreary desolation of Tilbury Crescent is a sorry change. Instead of the quaint peaked roofs and grand old churches, the verdant avenues and placid water, there are unfinished streets and terraces of raw-looking brick, half-built railway-arches, chasm-like cuttings newly made in the damp clay soil, and patches of rank greensward that mark the site of desolated fields. The sulphurous odours of a brickfield pervade the atmosphere about and around Tilbury Crescent. The din of a distant high-road, the roar of many wheels, and the clamour of excited costermongers, float in occasional gusts of sound upon the dismal stillness of the neighbourhood, where the shrill voices of

children, playing hopscotch in an adjacent street, are painfully audible.

Decent poverty has set a seal upon this little labyrinth of streets and squares and crescents and terraces, before the builder's men have left the newest of the houses, while there are still roofless skeletons at every corner, waiting till the speculator who began them shall have raised enough money to finish them. The neighbourhood lies northward, and the rents of those yellow-brick tenements are cheap. So decent poverty, in all its many guises, comes hitherward for shelter. Newly-married lawyers' clerks take up their abode in the eight-roomed dwellings, and you shall divine, by the fashion of blinds and curtains, the trim propriety of doorsteps and tiny front gardens, whether the young householders have drawn prizes in the matrimonial lottery. Small tradesmen bring their wares to the little shops, which break out here and there at the corners of the streets, and struggle feebly for a livelihood. Patient young dressmakers exhibit fly-blown fashion-

plates in parlour windows, and wait hopefully or despairingly, as the case may be, for custom and patronage. And in more windows than the chance pedestrian would care to count hangs the pasteboard announcement of apartments to let.

Eustace Thorburn came to Tilbury Crescent in the blazing July noontide. He had landed at St. Katherine's Wharf, and had made his way to this northern suburb on foot. He was rich enough to have ridden in an omnibus, or to have enjoyed the luxury of a hansom, had he been so minded; but he was an ambitious young man, and had cultivated the nobler Spartan virtues from his earliest boyhood. The few pounds in his possession would have to serve him until he returned to the Parthenée, or obtained some new employment; so he had much need to be careful of shillings, and chary even of pence. The walk through the dirty bustling London streets seemed long and weary to him; but his thoughts were more weary than that pedestrian journey under the meridian sun,

and the sad memories of his youth were a heavier burden than the carpet-bag he carried slung across his shoulder.

He knocked at the door of one of the shabbiest houses in the crescent, and was admitted by an elderly woman, who was slipshod and slovenly, but who had a good-natured face, which brightened as she recognized the traveller. In the next moment she remembered the sad occasion of his coming, and put on that conventional expression of profound sorrow which people assume so easily for the affliction of others.

"Ah, dear, dear, Mr. Thorburn!" she cried, "I never thought to see you come back like this, and she not here to bid you welcome, poor sweet lamb!"

The young man held up his hand to stay the torrent of sympathy. "Please, don't talk to me about my mother," he said, quietly; "I can't bear it—yet."

The honest woman looked at him wonderingly. She had been accustomed to deal with

people who liked to talk of their griefs, and she did not understand this quiet way of putting aside a sorrow. The mourners whom she had encountered had worn their sackcloth and covered themselves with ashes in the face of the world, and here was a young man who had not so much as a band upon his hat, and who rejected her friendly sympathy!

"I can have my—the old rooms, for a week or so, I suppose, Mrs. Bane?"

"Yes, sir. I've took the liberty to put a bill up, thinking as perhaps you might not return from abroad; and if it's for a week only, perhaps you'd allow the bill to remain? There are so many apartments about this neighbourhood, you see, sir, and people are that pushing now-a-days, that a poor widow-woman has scarcely a chance. It's a hard thing to be left alone in the world, Mr. Thorburn."

There was an open wound in the heart of Eustace Thorburn which ignorant hands were always striking.

"It's a hard thing to be left alone in the

world," he thought, echoing the landlady's lamentation. "*She* was left alone in the world before I was born."

The landlady repeated her question.

"Oh yes, you can leave the bill; but don't let any one come to look at the rooms to-day. I am not likely to be here more than a week. Can I go upstairs at once?"

Mrs. Bane plunged her hand into a capacious pocket, and, after much searching the depths of that receptacle, produced a door-key, which she handed to Eustace.

"Mr. Mayfield told me to lock the door, sir, because of papers and such-like. The bedroom door is fastened on the inside."

The young man nodded, and went upstairs with a brisk, rapid footstep, and not with that ponderous, solemn tread which Mrs. Bane would have considered appropriate to his bereaved condition.

"And I thought he would have took on dreadful!" she ejaculated, as she went back to her underground kitchen, where there was gene-

rally an atmosphere laden with the steam of boiling soap-suds, or an odour of singed ironing-blanket.

Eustace Thorburn unlocked the door, and went into the room which had so lately been inhabited by his mother. It was a dingy little sitting-room, opening into a bedroom that was still smaller. It was a lodging of the same pattern as a thousand other lodgings in newly-built suburbs. The personalty of the woman who had left it for a still narrower lodging would scarcely have realized twenty shillings under the auctioneer's hammer; and yet to Eustace Thorburn the shabby room was eloquent of the dead. That dilapidated rosewood workbox—for which the auctioneer would have been ashamed to propose a starting bid of a shilling—conjured up the vision of a patient creature bending over her work. The little stand of books—cheap editions of the poets, in worn cloth binding—recalled *her* sweet face, illumined by a transient splendour, as the inspired verses of her favourites lifted her above

this earth and all her earthly sorrows. The valueless china inkstand, and worn blotting-book, had been used by her for more than four years. Eustace Thorburn took the things up one by one, and put them to his lips. There was something almost passionate in the kiss which he imprinted upon those lifeless objects —it was the kiss which he would have pressed upon her pale lips, had he been recalled in time to bid her farewell. He kissed the books which she had been wont to read, the pen with which she had written, and then cast himself suddenly into the low chair where he had so often seen her seated, and abandoned himself to his grief. Had Mrs. Bane, the landlady, heard these convulsive sobs, and seen the tears streaming between the fingers which the young man clasped before his eyes, she would have had no need to complain of Mr. Thorburn's want of emotion. For a long time he sat in the same attitude, still weeping. But the passionate grief wore itself out at last. He dashed the tears from his eyes with an impatient gesture, and rose,

pale and calm, to begin the work which he had set himself to do.

His love for his mother had been the ruling passion of his life. She was at rest now, and he could face the future calmly. He could go forth to meet his destiny with a spirit at once superior to hope and fear. It was for *her* he had hoped; it was for her he had feared. He stood alone now; his breast was no longer a rampart to shield her from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." The arrows might come thick and fast now; they could only wound him; and he already had suffered the deepest wound that evil fortune could inflict upon him. He had lost *her*.

The bitterest sting of all lay in the knowledge that she had never been happy. Her son had loved her with unspeakable tenderness. He had protected her and worked for her, and admired and adored her; but he had never been able to make her happy. That gentle, womanly heart had been too deeply wounded in the past. Eustace Thorburn had known this;

and knowing this had been patient, because he would not trouble her mild spirit by any show of impatience. He had known that she had been wronged, and yet had never asked her the name of the wrong-doer. He, her natural champion and avenger, had never sought for vengeance upon the man whose treachery or unkindness had blighted her life. He had held his peace, because to question her would have been to pain her; and how could he give her pain? So he had been patient, in spite of a passionate desire for ever smouldering in his heart—the desire to avenge his mother's wrongs.

She was at rest; and the time for vengeance had arrived. The same fatal influence which had destroyed her happiness had shortened her life. In the prime of womanhood, before a wrinkle had lined her forehead, or a silver thread appeared amidst her soft brown hair, she had gone to her grave, unutterably patient to the last, but broken-hearted from the very first.

The young man put his grief away from him,

and set himself to consider the new business of his life.

The one desire of his mind was that of vengeance upon his mother's nameless enemy; and the thought that this enemy was his own father was powerless to soften his heart in the smallest measure, or to hinder him for one single hour from the achievement of his purpose.

"I want to know who he is," he said to himself. "My first business must be to discover his name; my next, to make him more ashamed of that name than I am of my namelessness."

He went to the chimney-piece, where there was a letter waiting for him, sealed with a sprawling black seal, and addressed to him in the inscrutable penmanship of his uncle.

The envelope contained only a few lines, but enclosed in it there was a little bunch of keys, with every one of which the young man was familiar. He took them up with a sigh, and looked at them one by one, almost as tenderly

as he had looked at the books. The commonest object in that chamber had its association for him,—and with every such association, the grief which he had tried so hard to put away from him took possession of him anew.

There was a ponderous, old-fashioned mahogany desk on a side-table, and it was in this desk that the lonely inhabitant of the room had been accustomed to keep her letters and papers, together with those few valueless relics —that pitiful jetsam and flotsam from the shipwreck of hope and happiness which are left to the most desolate creature.

Eustace unlocked and opened the desk as softly as if his mother had been sleeping near him. He had often seen her seated at this desk; he had once surprised her in tears, with a little packet of letters in her hand, but he had never seen the contents of any of those discoloured papers, tied with faded ribbons, and disfigured by obsolete postmarks. And now that she was gone, it was his duty to examine those papers,—or so he considered. Yet there

was a shade of compunction in his mind as he touched the first packet, and he felt as if he had been committing a sacrilege.

The first packet was labelled "My Mother's Letters," and contained the epistles of some good womanly creature, written to a daughter who was away at boarding-school. They were full of allusions to a comfortable middle-class household—a tradesman's household, as it seemed, for there were occasional references to events that had occurred in the shop, and to "my dear husband's over-exerting himself in the business," and to "Daniel's unsettled ways and indisposition to take to his father's occupation."

Eustace smiled faintly as he read of poor Daniel, whose unsettled ways had been notorious before Sir Rowland Hill's post-office amendments, and who remained unsettled in these latter days of electric telegraphy and labyrinthine railway cuttings.

The letters were very sweet, by reason of the tender motherly spirit which pervaded

every line,—more or less ill-spelt here and there, and by no means well written, but overflowing with affection. Again and again the writer implored her "dearest Sissy" not to fret, and to look forward to the holidays, which would come very soon, when Sissy would see her dear mother and father, whose household love she pined for in the great middle-class boarding-school, as it was evident by the tone of maternal letters which replied to lamentations from desolate home-sick Sissy. There were hampers for dearest Sissy, and little presents,—a coral necklace from father, a sash from mother, and once, a tinselled portrait of Mr. Edmund Kean in the character of Othello, with a tunic of real crimson satin let into the paper,—a tinselled portrait which had been poor unsettled Daniel's labour of love in the long winter evenings, and which the mother dwelt on with evident pleasure.

Eustace knew that these letters had been written by his grandmother,—the grandmother who had never held him in her arms, or taken

pride in his baby graces. He lingered lovingly over the old-fashioned sheets of letter-paper,—he gazed fondly upon the stiffly-formed signature, "Elizabeth Mayfield," and he dropped some few tears upon the worn yellow paper, which had been blotted with many tears before to-day. It was not possible that he could think of his mother in her innocent school-days without emotion.

The second packet contained only three letters, addressed to dearest Sissy at home, when she had ceased to be a school-girl, and these were in a hand not altogether unfamiliar to Eustace. It was a youthful modification of Daniel Mayfield's inscrutable caligraphy; and again Eustace Thorburn smiled with the same faint smile. The letters were written from a lawyer's office where the lad was articled; for Daniel had persisted in his aversion to his father's business, and had declared himself unfitted for anything upon earth except the law, for which he was assured he had a special vocation. They were pleasant, boyish letters,

and full of the slang of the day—such locutions as "Flare up!" and "What a shocking bad hat!" and "There you go with your eye out!" and other conversational embellishments peculiar to the period. But through all the slang and young-mannish affectations there was an undercurrent of genuine affection for the writer's "dear little dark-eyed Sissy." He knew no end of pretty girls in London, he told her, but not one worthy to be compared with his darling Celia. "And when I am on the Rolls, with slap-up chambers of my own in the Fields, and a first-rate business, you shall come and keep house for me, Sissy; and we'll have a little cottage at Putney, and a wherry, and I'll row you up the river every evening after business; and while my sentimental little sister sits in the stern reading a novel, her faithful Daniel will get himself into training for a sculling-match."

The first two letters were full of hopeful allusions to the writer's prospects. The young man seemed to fancy he was going to

make a royal progress through the different grades of his profession, and there was scarcely any limit to the pleasant things which he promised his only sister. But, in the third letter, written after an interval of six months, all this was changed. The life of an articled clerk was a slavery, compared to which the existence of a negro in the West Indian sugar-plantations must be one perpetual delight. Daniel was tired of his profession, and informed his dearest Sissy, in strict confidence, that no power on earth would ever make a lawyer of him.

"It isn't in me, my dear Celia," he wrote; "your impetuous Dan is not fashioned out of the stuff which makes an attorney. I've tried to take to the law, just as I tried to take to the circulating-library and fancy-stationery business, to please poor father and mother; but it's no use. You mustn't say anything to the dear old dad, for he'd begin to be unhappy about the money he wasted on my articles; and before he discovers that I don't take to the law, I shall have taken to something which will make me a

rich man, and I shall be able to give him back his money three times over."

And then Daniel Mayfield went on to give a flourishing description of a very bright and splendid castle-in-the-air which he had lately erected. He had found a Pactolus in his inkstand, and something better than a landed estate in a quire of foolscap. He was a genius. The divine *afflatus* had descended upon him, and Coke and Blackstone might go hang. He was a poet, an essayist, an historian, a novelist, a playwright—anything you like. He had been a scribbler from the days of his childhood, and of late had scribbled more than ever. And after the innumerable failures and disappointments which constitute that Slough of Despond through which every literary aspirant must pass, he had succeeded in getting an article inserted in one of those coarsely-written and poorly-illustrated comic periodicals from the ashes whereof arose that bright Phœnix, *Punch*. And the editor of the periodical had promised to take further contributions from the same

lively pen, Daniel informed his sister. He had received two guineas sterling coin of the realm for his lucubration, "thrown off in half an hour," he told dear Sissy. And thereupon he entered into a calculation of his future income, at the rate of four guineas an hour for all the working-hours in the day. "Messrs. Screwem and Swindleton don't get as much for their time, in spite of their genius for running up the six-and-eightpences," wrote Daniel.

There was a mournful smile upon Eustace Thorburn's face as he read the letters. He knew the writer so well, and knew into what a poor, imperfect, dilapidated habitation that air-built castle had resolved itself. The young man had not deceived himself as to his own powers; he had only wasted them. The talents had been his, and he had scattered the precious gifts here and there with a reckless hand—too rich to fear poverty, too strong to apprehend exhaustion. He had thrown his pearls before swine, and had allowed his diamonds to be set in worthless crowns of brass and tinsel. The

flower of his youth had faded, while he, who might have achieved greatness—and that which seems a deal more difficult for genius to achieve, respectability—was only Dan Mayfield, a newspaper hack, one of a modern Jacob Tonson's "clever hands," a lounger in taverns, a penniless Bohemian, with flowing hair, which time was beginning to thin, and eyes at whose corners the crow had set the ineffaceable print of his feet.

Eustace replaced the letters with a respectful hand. Was he not tampering with the ashes of his mother's youth, and was not every paper in that desk sanctified by the tears of the dead?

"Poor Uncle Dan!" he murmured, gently; "poor, kind, sanguine Uncle Dan!"

CHAPTER III.

"TAKE BACK THESE LETTERS, MEANT FOR HAPPINESS."

THERE were several notes and letters in the next packet which Eustace Thorburn examined, and over these he lingered very long—reading some amongst them a second time, and returning to reconsider others which he had put aside after a first perusal. These letters were written on the thickest and finest paper, and exhaled a faint odour of millefleurs, so faint as to be only the impalpable ghost of a departed perfume. Notes and letters were alike dated, but the only signature to be found amongst them was the single initial H.

Eustace read them in the order in which they had been written.

"The author of the book which Miss May-

field was reading on Tuesday afternoon has called at the library three times since that day, but has not had the happiness of seeing her. Will Miss Mayfield be good enough to write one line, saying *when* she may be seen? The writer, who feels himself unworthy of her eloquent praises, most earnestly wishes for an interview, if only of a few minutes' duration.

"*The George Hotel, June* 6, 1843."

"The author of the book?" repeated Eustace; "what book? Was this man a writer?"

This letter had been delivered by hand. The next bore the postmark of Bayham, that Dorsetshire watering-place to which Daniel's letters had been addressed. It was directed to

"C. M.,

"*The Post-Office,*

"*Bayham.*

"*To be left till called for.*"

"The seducer's favourite address," muttered Eustace, as he unfolded the letter.

"*George Hotel, June* 15, 1843.

"My dear Miss Mayfield,—If you could know the time I have wasted since Thursday week, in the vain endeavour to obtain a glimpse of your face, between the sheets of music and coloured lithographs in your father's window, you would be more inclined to believe what I told you on that day. I told you that, if I did not see you, I should write, and I told you where I should address my letter. You forbade me to write, and assured me that my letter would lie at the post-office unasked for. But you, who are so sweet and gentle, could hardly adhere to such a cruel resolve. I dare to hope that this will reach your hands, and that you will forgive me for having disobeyed you.

"I do so much wish to see you again—if only once more—yes, even if only once. I am haunted day and night by the vision of that sweet face which I first saw bending over one of my own books. Do you remember that day?—only three weeks ago; and yet it seems

to me as if a new existence began for me upon that day, and as if I were older by half a life-time since then. Sweet tender face, with the dark eyes and wild-rose bloom, shall I ever learn to forget it? Will it ever cease to come between me and my books? I was trying to read a grand old tragedy last night: but you would not let me. You were Electra, and I saw you bending over your brother's funereal urn, as I had seen you bending over the silly volume which you praised so sweetly. The Greek tragedy reminded me of that doctrine of fatality which we laugh at in these modern days. And yet surely Destiny has her hand in the fashion of our lives. I had been writing letters on the day on which I first saw you, and the people here had given me such wretched pens and paper that I sallied out to seek better for myself. If they had given me decent writing materials, I might never have seen you. There are three other places in the town at which I might have sought what I wanted; but Destiny laid her hand on my coat-collar, and

conducted me to your father's library. I went in quietly, with all my thoughts two hundred miles away from Bayham. I saw you sitting behind the counter, with a book in your lap; and all my thoughts came back to Bayham, to take up their abode with you for ever. You were so absorbed in your book, that you did not hear my modest request for a quire of letter-paper, until it had been three times enunciated; and I meanwhile had time to read the title of the book which interested you. I suppose every writer can read the title of his *own* book upside-down. You looked up at last, with such a pretty, shy, innocent look, and the wild-rose bloom came into your cheeks. And then I asked you what you thought of the book; and you praised it with such bewitching eloquence, and wondered who the writer could be. I had heard the book lauded by a great many people, and abused by more; but I had never until that moment felt the smallest temptation to reveal myself as the author of it. I had, indeed, taken great trouble to conceal my

identity. But when *you* praised my work, I flung prudence to the winds. It was so delightful to see your bright blush, your bewitching confusion, when I told you that it was my happiness to have pleased you. O Celia, if you like my book so well, why is it that you distrust and avoid me? Let me see you, dear, I implore — anywhere—at any time—under any conditions you may choose to impose upon me. I wait in this dull town, day after day, in the hope of seeing you. A hundred duties call me away! and yet I wait. I shall wait for a week after having posted this letter; and if I receive no sign from you during that time, I shall leave Bayham, never again to venture within its fatal precincts.

"Ever and ever faithfully yours,

"H."

There was an interval of six weeks between the dates of the second and third letters; and there was a considerable alteration in the tone of the writer. He no longer pleaded for an

interview with the stationer's daughter. It was evident that he had seen her very often during the interval; and his letter was full of allusions to past meetings.

"My own sweet Love," he began,—(ah, what a change in six short weeks from "My dear Miss Mayfield!")—"my ever dearest, there is *no* gulf between us, or no gulf so wide that love cannot bridge it over. Why are you so cruel as to doubt and avoid me? You know that I love you. You told me that you believed in my love last night when we stood by the sea in that sweet twilight, and when there was such a solemn quiet all around us that it would have been easy to fancy ourselves cast away upon some desert island. You talk to me of your humble birth,—as if the birth of an angel or a goddess could be humble,—and you implore me to go back to the world and its slavery, and to forget this bright glimpse of something better than the world. I am only five-and-twenty, Celia; and yet I fancied I had outlived the

possibility of such love as that which I feel for you.

"You told me on Saturday that your father's anger would be something terrible if he discovered our acquaintance. I should put an end to all your fears, dearest, by going straight to Mr. Mayfield and demanding the right to call you my own for ever, if I were not fettered hand and foot by social difficulties. You have some cause to doubt me, Celia; and if you were not the most generous of women, I should fear to speak frankly. Whenever we are married, our marriage must be kept secret until my father's death releases me from bondage. You will think me a coward, perhaps, when I confess to you that I dare not openly defy my father; but you can scarcely imagine how complete the slavery of a son may be when he is an only son, and his father cherishes grand views for his advancement. I write about these wretched obstacles to our happiness, my sweet one, because when you are with me I *cannot* speak of the difficulties which beset us. My troubles

take flight when those dear eyes look up at me. I forget this work-a-day world and all its ills; and I could fancy this earth still the home of the gods, and foolish Pandora's casket unopened. When I am away from you, all is changed, and hope only remains.

"So I shall make no allusion to this letter when we meet, dearest. We will be children, and fancy this world young again. We will wander arm-in-arm on that delicious stretch of golden sand beyond the curve of the bay, and far away from the bustle of the town. We will forget all our commonplace difficulties and troubles, and that the gods have abandoned the earth. Ah! if we had only lived in those mythic ages, when Eros himself might have taken compassion upon our sorrows, and transported us to some enchanted isle, where our youth and love should be immortal as his own divinity!

"Let me see you at seven, dear love. I shall await your coming at the old spot, and you will easily shake off your confidante and

companion, Miss K. Can you suggest any feminine prettiness which Miss K. would care to possess? I should like to offer her some testimony of my respectful admiration; she has been so very indulgent to us, in her own prim fashion. Let me know whether it is to be a necklace, or a bracelet, or a pair of earrings, and I will see what the Bayham jeweller can do for us. And now, dearest and loveliest, adieu for a few hours; and may Phaethon whip his horses to the West, and bring the sweet sunset hour and the rosy light upon our favourite stretch of sand.

"Ever and ever yours,

"H."

There were many more letters—less playful and more passionate—the dates extending over six or seven weeks; and then there was a considerable interval, and then two letters written in the January of the following year. The writer had won his dearest Celia's consent to a clandestine marriage. She was to leave her home

secretly, and was to go with him to London, where all arrangements had been made. It was very evident that her consent to this step had not been won without great difficulty. The letters were full of protestations and promises. The writer was always repeating how his heart had been wrung by the sight of her tears, how the thought of her sorrow was almost more than he could bear. But he had borne it, nevertheless, and had persisted in his own designs, whatever they might be, for the last letter contained all necessary directions for the girl's flight. She was to meet her lover at the coach-office after dark; and they were to travel the first stage of the journey by the night-mail, and then take post across country and get to London by a different road; so that any one following them, or making inquiries about them on the direct road from Bayham, would be completely baffled.

This was all—and yet more than enough for the young man, who sat brooding over the last letter with a gloomy face. It was such a common story, and so easily put together: the

poor, weak, provincial beauty, who is lured away from her quiet home under the pretence of a secret marriage, a marriage which is never solemnized, and was never intended to be solemnized; then the brief dream of happiness, the noontide holiday in a new garden of Eden, with the fatal serpent, which is called Remorse, always in hiding beneath the flowers; and the speedy close to that fever-dream of bliss—utter despair and bitterness. This was the hackneyed romance which Eustace Thorburn wove out of the packet of letters signed with the initial H.; and it was so cruel and humiliating a story that the young man suffered his weary head to sink upon the little heaps of paper, and wept aloud.

He had recovered in some measure from this passion of grief, and was employed in arranging the letters, when the door was opened, and a man came into the room. The man was somewhere between forty and fifty, and was a very remarkable-looking person. He had once been handsome—of that there was no doubt, but

the flower of his youth had faded in some pernicious atmosphere, and the chilling blasts of a premature autumn had blighted him while he should have been still in all the glory of his midsummer prime. He had a fiery red nose, and fiery black eyes, and dark hair, which he wore longer than was authorized by the fashion of the day. There were gray hairs amongst those straggling dark locks, and the man's moustache had that tinge of Tyrian purple in its blackness which betrays the handiwork of the chemist. He was a man of imposing presence, tall and stalwart; and although he lacked the conventional graces of a modern gentleman, he was not without a certain style and dash of his own. To-day he wore mourning, and there was an unwonted softness in his manner. This was Daniel Mayfield; a man whose genius had been of much use to other people, but of little benefit to himself, and a man who contemplated the visage of his deadliest foe whenever he looked in the glass.

Yes, the only enemy Mr. Mayfield had made

was himself. Everybody liked him. He was your true Bohemian, your genuine Arab of the great desert of London. Money ran between his fingers like water. He had been more successful, and had worked harder, than men whose industry had won for them houses and lands, horses and carriages, plate and linen and Sèvres china. His acquaintance were always calculating his income, and wondering what he did with it. Did he gamble? Did he speculate on the Stock Exchange? Did he consume fifteen hundred a year in tavern-parlours? Daniel himself could not have answered these questions. He wondered as much as any one about this mysterious enigma. He had never known how he spent his money. It went, somehow, and there came an end to it. Jack borrowed a few pounds; and there was a night's card-playing, through which the luck went against poor Dan; and there was a Greenwich dinner on Tom's birthday; and he took a fancy to a rare old copy of the *Diable Boiteux*, on large paper, sold at Willis and Sotheran's;

and then there were occasional periods of famine, during which Dan had recourse to a friendly usurer, for whose succour he ultimately paid something like a hundred and fifty per cent. So the money went. Daniel was the last person to trouble himself as to the manner of its departure. When his pockets were empty, he called for pen, ink, and paper, and set himself to fill them.

To-day this reckless genius was something less than his accustomed self. The fierce black eyes were shadowed by a settled sadness of expression, and the rollicking swagger of the Bohemian was changed to an unwonted quietness of gait and gesture. He stood for a few moments near the doorway, contemplating his nephew. The young man looked up suddenly and stretched out his hands.

"Dear Uncle Dan!" he cried, grasping the outstretched hands of his visitor. The fierce grip of his uncle's muscular fingers was the only direct expression of sympathy which he received from that gentleman. The men under-

stood each other too well for there to be need of many words between them.

Daniel looked at the open desk.

"You have been examining your mother's papers," he said, in a low voice. "Have you discovered anything?"

"More than enough, and yet not half what I must know, sooner or later. I have never asked you any questions, Uncle Dan. I couldn't bring myself to do it. But now—now that she is gone——"

"I understand you, dear boy. I know little enough myself (for I never could find it in my heart to question her, God bless her!), but you have a right to know that little; and if you can put the story together out of anything you have found there—" said Daniel, pointing to the desk.

"I understand the story—I want to know the name of the man!" cried Eustace, passionately.

"I have wanted to know that for the last twenty years," answered Daniel.

"Then you can tell me nothing?"

"I can tell you very little. When I left home to be articled to a brace of London lawyers, I left the brightest and loveliest creature that ever a man was proud to call his sister. We were the two only children of comfortable tradespeople in a quiet little watering-place, you know, Eustace. We lived in a square, brick-built house, facing the sea. My father kept a circulating-library and reading-room, and my mother did something in the millinery line. Between them both they made a very comfortable income. Bayham was a sleepy, out-of-the-world place, in which a tradesman who once manages to establish himself generally enjoys a snug monopoly. I know that we were very well off, and that we were people of importance in our way. My sister was the prettiest girl in Bayham. She faded so early, became so complete a wreck, that you can scarcely imagine what a lovely creature she was in those days. She was ashamed of the notice her beauty drew upon her, and she had a pretty, childish shy-

ness of manner which made her all the more charming. A great, hulking hobbledehoy of eighteen seldom knows what beauty is; but I knew that my sister was lovely, and I admired and loved her. I used to boast of her to my fellow-clerks, I remember, and made myself obnoxious by turning up my uncultivated nose at their sisters. I was so proud of our little Cely."

He stopped and shaded his eyes with his hands for some minutes, while Eustace waited impatiently.

"To make a long story short," continued Daniel, "there came a letter from my father, written in a very shaky style and almost incoherent in its wording, to tell me that they were in great trouble at home, and that I was to go back to them immediately. Of course I thought of money troubles—we are such sordid creatures by nature, I suppose—and I fancied there was commercial ruin at home, and thought remorsefully of all the money I had cost my father, and the little good I had ever been to him.

When I got to Bayham, I found that there was something worse than want of money in the grief-stricken household. Celia had disappeared, leaving a letter for my father, in which she told him that she was going away to be married; but there were reasons why her marriage and the name of her husband should be kept a secret for some time; but that he had promised to bring her back to Bayham directly he was free to reveal his name and position. Of course we all knew what this meant; and my father and I set out to seek our poor cheated girl, with as gloomy a despair at our hearts as if we had gone to seek her in the realms of Pluto."

"And you failed?"

"Yes, lad, we failed ignominiously. There were neither electric telegraphs nor private detectives in those days; and after following several false scents, and spending a great deal of money, we went back to Bayham—my father looking ten years older for his wasted labour. He died three years after that, and my mother followed him very quickly, for they were one of

those old-fashioned couples who cling to each other so fondly through life that they must needs sink together into the grave. They died; and the poor girl, whom they had forgiven from the very first hour of her offending, was not permitted to comfort their last hours. They had been dead more than twelve months when I saw a woman's faded face flit past me in the most crowded part of the Strand. I walked on a few paces, with a strange, sudden pain at my heart, and then I turned and hurried after the woman, for I knew that I had seen my sister."

There was another brief pause—broken only by the short, eager breathing of Eustace, and one profound sigh from Daniel.

"Well, boy, she had been living in London for more than three years, hidden in the same big jungle which sheltered me, and Providence had never sent me across her path. She had been living as many such lonely creatures do live in London; managing to exist somehow—now by means of one starvation work, now another. I went home with her, and we gathered

her few pitiful possessions together, and carried them and you away with us in a cab, and—you know the rest. She lived with me until you were old enough to be in danger of suffering from a bad example; and then she made some excuse for leaving me—poor innocent soul, she was afraid lest dissolute Daniel should contaminate her pet-lamb. In all the time that we were together, I forbore to question her; I always believed that she would confide in me sooner or later, and I waited patiently in that hope. She told me once that she had made two journeys to Bayham—the first while her father and mother were still alive, and that she had waited and watched, under cover of the winter evening darkness, until she had contrived to see them both; the second when they were lying in the parish churchyard. This was all she ever told me. I asked her one day if she would tell me the name of your father. But she looked at me with a sad, frightened face, poor child, and said No, she could never tell me that; he was away from England—at the

other end of the world, she believed. This was the only attempt I ever made to penetrate the secret of your birth."

"The letters—the man's letters—are full of allusions to an intended marriage. Do you think there was no marriage?"

"I am sure there was none."

Eustace groaned aloud. For a long time he had suspected as much as this; but to hear his suspicions confirmed by the opinion of another was none the less bitter.

"You have some reason for saying as much, Uncle Dan?" he asked, presently.

"I have this reason, Eustace: if my sister could have come back to Bayham, she would have come. The sorrow must have been a very bitter one which kept her away from her father and mother."

The young man made no reply to his uncle. He walked to the window, and looked out at the dreary street, where the perpetual organ-grinder, who seems to grind all our sorrows in a musical mill, was grinding on at the usual

pace. For the common world the thing which he played was an Ethiopian melody; but Eustace never afterwards heard the simple air without recalling this miserable hour, and the story of his mother's luckless life.

He came back to his kinsman. Heaven pity him, the law denied him even this human tie, and it was only by courtesy he could call this man his uncle. He came away from the window, and flung himself on honest Daniel's breast and sobbed aloud.

"And now take me to my mother's grave," he said presently.

CHAPTER IV.

UN MENAGE A DEUX.

Harold Jerningham lived in Park Lane. To say this, and to say in addition to this that it was his privilege to inhabit a snug little bachelor dwelling, with bay-windows from the roof to the basement, is to say that he was one of those favoured beings for whom this world must needs be a terrestrial paradise. There are mansions in Park Lane, stately and gigantic—mansions with lofty picture-galleries, and staircases of polished marble, and conservatories which roof-in small forests of tropical verdure: but the glory of this western Eden lies not in them. Are there not mansions in Belgravia and Tyburnia, in Piccadilly and Mayfair? Palaces are common enough in this western hemisphere, and the roturier may find

one ready for his occupation, seek it when he will. But it is only in Park Lane that those delicious little bachelor snuggeries are to be found, those enchanting toy-houses, "too small to live in, and too big to hang at your watch-chain," as Lord Hervey said of the Duke's cottage at Chiswick—those irregular little edifices, with bow-windows, and balconies, and miniature conservatories breaking out in every direction, and with a perfume of the country still about them.

The house which Harold Jerningham occupied when he favoured the metropolis by his presence was one of the most enchanting of these enviable habitations. The house had been a pretty old-fashioned cottage with bow-windows, when Mr. Jerningham took it in hand, but in his possession it had undergone considerable change. He had transformed the rustic bows into deep roomy bays, and had thrown out balconies of iron scroll-work, whereon there flourished bright masses of flowers, and ferns, and mosses, amidst which no eye save

that of the nurseryman's minions ever beheld a faded leaf. He had built mysterious and spacious chambers at the back of the small dwelling, on ground that had once been a garden; and beyond these chambers you came suddenly upon a shady quadrangle roofed-in with glass, where there was a wonderful tesselated pavement, which had been transported bodily from a chamber in Pompeii, and where there were ferns and cool grasses, and a porphyry basin of water-lilies, and the perpetual plashing of a fountain.

Mr. Jerningham had furnished his house after his own fashion, without regard to the styles that were "in," or the styles that were "out." One rich carpet of dark crimson velvet-pile lined the house from the hall to the attics, like a jewel-casket; and the same warm and yet sombre tint pervaded the window-hangings and the walls. The ordinary visitor found very little to admire in Mr. Jerningham's drawing-room. Thin-legged tables and chairs adorned with goats' heads and festoons of

flowers; a shabby little writing-table, considerably the worse for wear, but enlivened by patches of china, whereon rosy little Cupids frisked and tumbled against a background of deep azure; a generally untidy effect of scattered bronzes and intaglios, gold-and-enamel snuff-boxes and bonbonnières, Chelsea tea-cups, and antique miniatures; and on the walls some tapestry, just a little faded, with the eternal shepherds and shepherdesses of the Watteau school. The connoisseur only could have told that the spindle-legged chairs and tables were in the purest style of the Louis-Seize period; that the shabby little writing-table with the *plaques* of old Sèvres had belonged to Marie Antoinette, and had been sold for something over a thousand pounds; that the bronzes and intaglios, the miniatures and bonbonnières were the representatives of a fortune; and that the somewhat faded tapestry was the choicest work of the Gobelins, after designs by Boucher.

Harold Jerningham was fifty years of age, and one of the richest men in London. The

poorer members of the world in which he lived talked of him as "a lucky fellow, by Jove, and a man who ought to consider himself uncommonly fortunate never to have known what it was to be hard-up, or to have a pack of extravagant sons sucking his blood, like so many modern vampires, confound 'em!" Harold Jerningham had neither sons nor daughters, and lived in a bachelor's snuggery. But Harold Jerningham was not a bachelor. He had married a very beautiful young first cousin some seven years before, and the union had not been a happy one. It had only endured for two years, at the end of which time the husband and wife had separated, without open scandal of any kind whatsoever. Mr. Jerningham had chosen that occasion for a long-postponed journey to the East, and Mrs. Jerningham had quietly withdrawn herself from the toy-house in Park Lane to another toy-house on the banks of the Thames, within two or three hundred yards of Wolsey's old palace at Hampton. But let man and wife arrange their affairs never so quietly,

the world will have its own ideas, and make its own theories on the subject. The world—that is to say, Mr. Jerningham's world, which was bounded on the south by Great George Street, Westminster, and on the north by Bryanstone Square—told several different stories of Mr. Jerningham's marriage. The beautiful young cousin had possessed the real Jerningham pride, which was the pride of the Miltonic Lucifer himself, wherefore the peaceful union of two Jerninghams was an impossibility, said one faction. But the majority were inclined to believe Mr. Jerningham in some manner guilty. Neither his youth nor his middle age had been spotless. Too proud and too refined to affect coarse vices or common dissipations, he had done more mischief and had been infinitely more dangerous than the common sinner. The master of a ruined household had cursed the name of Harold Jerningham, and innocent children had grown up to blush at the mention of that fatal name. For three-and-forty years of his life he had been a bachelor, and had

laughed at the men who bartered their liberty for the sake of a wife's monotonous companionship and the prattle of tiresome children. He had not been a deliberate sinner—indeed, the deliberate sinners seem to be a very small minority, and even the man who poisons his wife with minim doses of aconite will tell the gaol-chaplain that he was a poor, weak creature, led away from time to time by the impulse of the moment. The Tempter took him by the hand, and drew him on, foot by foot, to his destruction. There is a thick and blinding fog for ever hanging over that fatally easy slope which leads to Avernus, whereby the traveller cannot perceive what progress he has made upon the dreadful downward road.

Mr. Jerningham had not been a deliberate sinner. He was not altogether vile and wicked. He was too selfish a man not to wish for the approbation of his fellow-man; he was too much of a poet and an artist not to perceive the loveliness of virtue. He was not an honourable man, but he knew that honour was a very

beautiful thing in the abstract, and he had a vague sense of discomfort when he acted dishonourably—just such an unpleasant sensation as he would have felt if he had worn an ill-fitting coat or an ill-made boot. He was not without benevolence, and could even be generous on occasion; but in all his useless life he had never sacrificed his own enjoyment for the good of another. He had taken his pleasure—all was told in those few words—and if pleasure was only to be had at the cost of evil-doing, he had shrugged his shoulders regretfully, and paid the price. He had gathered his roses, and other people had been inconvenienced by the thorns. The roses were still blooming about his pathway, but Mr. Jerningham no longer cared to pluck them. A man may grow tired even of roses. His marriage had been the result of one of those generous impulses which redeemed his character from utter worthlessness. A kinsman had died in Paris, in the extreme depths of patrician poverty, leaving behind him a very lovely

daughter, and a letter addressed to Harold Jerningham. The lovely daughter came to London, unattended, to deliver the letter, which she presented with her own hands to the elegant bachelor of three-and-forty. If she had not been a Jerningham, there is no knowing what story of sin and folly this interview might have inaugurated. But she was the daughter of Philip Jerningham, and the direct descendant of a Plantagenet prince ; so, after a brief acquaintance, she became the wife of the eldest representative of her family, and the mistress of that delicious little house in Park Lane, to say nothing of parks and mansions, farms and forests, in three of the fairest counties in England.

She ought to have considered herself the most fortunate of women, said the western world. Whether she did so consider herself or not, it speedily transpired that she was not a happy woman. For a few months the world had the pleasure of beholding Mr. Jerningham in frequent attendance on his wife. He handed

her in and out of carriages, he went out to dinner with her, he stood behind her chair at the Opera, he was even seen occasionally to drive her in his unapproachable mail-phaeton; and this seemed the perfection of domestic felicity. Then there came an interregnum, during which the Jerninghams were rarely seen together. They led an erratic existence, the rule of which seemed to be that Mr. Jerningham should be at Spa when his wife was in London, and that Mrs. Jerningham should be on her way to one of the country houses whenever her lord came to town. Then all at once arose the awful rumour that the Jerninghams had parted from each other for ever. Elegant gossips discussed the subject at feminine assemblies, and men talked about it in the clubs. Why had the Jerninghams separated? Was he to blame? Was she? Had Jerningham, the irresistible, dropped in for it at last? Or had he been playing his old trick, and had the little woman plucked up a spirit, and cut him? It is to be observed that

Mrs. Jerningham was amongst the tallest of her sex; but your genuine club-lounger would call Juno herself a little woman.

It became generally understood before long that Harold Jerningham had himself alone to thank for the failure of his matrimonial venture. He made his name somewhat notorious just at this time in conjunction with that of a French opera-dancer; so Mrs. Grundy shrugged her shoulders deprecatingly, and pitied Mrs. Jerningham. "A superb creature, my dear; the very model of propriety; and a thousand times too good for that dissipated wretch, Harold Jerningham," exclaimed the sagacious Mrs. Grundy.

While the world made itself busy with the story of her brief married life, Emily Jerningham endured her wrongs and sorrows very quietly in the toy-villa at Hampton. She had an ample income settled on her by her husband; and as she had been steeped in poverty to the very lips before her marriage, it is scarcely strange, perhaps, if she forebore to complain of

Mr. Jerningham's conduct, and elected to talk about him—whenever intrusive people compelled her to mention his name—as her friend and benefactor. The world lauded her generosity, but considered itself injured by her reticence.

For the first twelve months after the separation, Mrs. Jerningham secluded herself from all society except that of a few chosen friends, and devoted herself to the cultivation of orchids at the toy-villa. She started with the intention of passing the remainder of her days amongst the chosen friends and the orchids; but she was young and handsome, rich and accomplished, and society had chosen to exalt her into a social martyr. So people penetrated the depths of her suburban retreat, and beguiled her to return to the world, of which she had seen so little. She went into society, tolerably secured from the hazard of meeting her husband, who had his own particular circle, and that a very narrow one. Emily Jerningham was liked and admired. She was a beauty of the Juno type,

and the Jerningham pride became her. It was not by any means an intolerable pride, never parading itself on unnecessary occasions—pride defensive, and not pride aggressive; the pride of a prince who will be hand-and-glove with his dear Brummell, but who will order Mr. Brummell's carriage when the beau is insolent. Mrs. Jerningham was very popular. She had all the charm of widowhood without its danger. There was even the faintest flavour of Bohemianism about her position, spotless though her reputation might be. She was a saint and martyr who gave nice little dinners, and drove the most perfectly appointed of pony-phaetons. It was only by an indescribable something—a tranquil grace of bearing, a subdued ease of manner, a pervading harmony in every detail of her surroundings, from the unobtrusive colouring of her costume to the irreproachable livery of her servants—that strangers could distinguish her from other unprotected women of a very different class.

Young men were ready to worship and adore

her. "If the gurls a fellah meets were like Mrs. Jerningham, a fellah might make up his mind to go in for the domestic," said young Tyburnia to young Belgravia. "S'pose the odds are against Jerningham going off the hooks between this and the first spring-meeting, so as to give a party a chance with Mrs. J. herself," speculates young Belgravia, dreamily.

Mrs. Jerningham had enjoyed her quasi-widowhood some two years, when Mrs. Grundy's attention was called to a new phenomenon in connection with that lady.

It was observed that whoever was bidden to the nice little dinner-parties at the toy villa, there was one gentleman whose presence was a certainty. It was observed that whenever Mrs. Jerningham dropped in for an hour or two at any fashionable assembly, this gentleman was sure to drop in at the same hour, and to depart, listless and weary, as soon as he had handed that lady to her carriage. He was not one of the butterflies, but had been admitted amongst those gorgeous creatures on account of certain gifts

and qualities which the butterflies were able to appreciate. He was a powerful satirist, something of a poet, and the editor of a fashionable semi-political, semi-literary periodical, entitled "The Areopagus." He was five-and-thirty years of age, as handsome as an intellectual man can venture to be, and as elegant as a Lauzun or a Hervey. He had chambers in the Temple, a hunting-box in Berkshire, the *entrée* to all the best houses in London, and a hundred country houses always open to him. The Bohemians of the press watched his career with envious eyes, and would have rejoiced infinitely to catch him tripping on the difficult editorial pathway, so that they might band themselves together to rend him in pieces. The first time these watchful enemies obtained any advantage over him was when the western world began to whisper that he had fallen in love with Mrs. Jerningham. Then the literary Bohemians, the "Cherokees" and "Nightbirds," and all the little clubs and cliques in London, set up their malicious chatter; and

men who had never beheld Emily Jerningham's face speculated upon her conduct and gloated over the anticipation of some tremendous scandal which should terminate in Laurence Desmond's expulsion from the Eden of fashion.

The clubs and cliques were doomed to disappointment. No tremendous scandal ever arose. After a little discussion, the world agreed to accept this Platonic attachment between the lady and the editor as the most delightful of social romances. Mrs. Jerningham had taken care to provide herself with a perfect dragon in the way of an elderly widowed aunt, whose husband had been in the Church—and, sheltered thus, she was free to bestow her friendship on whom she pleased. Time, which sanctifies all things, gave a kind of legality to the Platonic attachment; and in due course it became an understood thing that Mr. Desmond would never marry until Harold Jerningham's death should set Emily free.

If any rumour of this romantic friendship reached Mr. Jerningham's ears, he received the

tidings very quietly. No *preux chevalier* ever spoke of his liege lady in a more reverential spirit than that in which Harold Jerningham spoke of his wife. It seemed as if these two people had agreed to sound each other's praises. Emily declared her husband to be the most noble and generous of men; Harold lauded his wife as the purest and most honourable of women. Malicious people shrugged their shoulders and hinted at hypocrisy.

"Jerningham was always a Jesuit," said one; "he is the Talleyrand of social life. And if you want to arrive at what he means, you must take the reverse of what he says."

"If they are both such delightful creatures, what a pity it is they couldn't live peaceably together!" said another.

CHAPTER V.

THE EDITOR OF THE "AREOPAGUS."

Amongst the contributors to the literary periodical of which Mr. Desmond was the editor, Daniel Mayfield occupied no insignificant position. The most genial and good-natured of men was at the same time the most ferocious and acrimonious of critics. When an innocent lamb was to be led to the slaughter, it was Daniel who assumed the butcher's apron and armed himself with the deadly knife. When a wretched scribbler was, in vulgar phraseology, to be "jumped upon," honest Daniel put on his hobnailed boots, and went at the savage operation with a will. The days were past in which the Edinburgh reviewer apologized with a gentle courtesy before he ventured to express

his dissent from the opinions of a lady historian. Criticism of to-day must be racy, at any price. Daniel's strong arm smote right and left, cleaving friend and foe indiscriminately asunder; and if it was on a woman's head that the blow descended, so much the better. The woman should have been at home studying her cookery-book, or working that domestic treadmill, the sewing-machine, instead of jostling her betters in the literary arena. "Hark forward, tantivy!" cried Daniel the critic; "run her down, trample her in the mud, make an end of her! She would quote Greek, would she? Why, the creature can barely spell plain English! She would prate of gods and goddesses, whose name she picks haphazard from a cheap abridgment of Lemprière. She would discourse of fashion and splendour, forsooth, who was "born in a garret, in a kitchen bred." Daniel the man was tender and courteous in his treatment of all womankind; but Daniel the racy essayist knew no mercy.

Daniel the pitiless was one of Mr. Desmond's

most valued coadjutors, and had received many offers of kindly service from that gentleman; but the literary Bohemian had refused all.

"A government appointment for me!" he cried, when the popular editor offered to use his influence with a Cabinet minister in Daniel's favour; "why, I should languish in the trammels of an official life. Regular hours and a regular salary would be the death of me in less than six months. I was born a dweller in tents, my dear Desmond, and my instincts are naturally disreputable. I can work seven hours at a stretch, and produce more copy in a given time than any man in London. I have been locked up in a room with a wet towel, a bottle of Scotch whiskey, and half a ream of paper, and have written five-and-thirty pages of a popular magazine between sunset and sunrise. But I must take it out in vagabondage afterwards. I am of the stuff which makes your Savages and your Morlands, and I shall die in a sponging-house when my time comes, I have no doubt. Nevertheless, I will ask a favour of

you some day, Desmond; but it shall be for somebody better worth serving than I am."

Within a week of Eustace Thorburn's return, Daniel Mayfield presented himself at the editor's chambers. He had done no work for the *Areopagus* for some little time, and Mr. Desmond was glad to bid him welcome.

"I've been thinking of looking you up for the last three weeks, Dan," said the editor, striking his pen across half a page of proof. "What second-hand twaddle this man writes! We want the sterling metal of your stylus, old fellow."

"Any new victim to be flayed alive?" asked Daniel. "I've been rather seedy for the last week or two, and perhaps a little of the old work will set me right again."

"You'll find plenty of material there," answered Mr. Desmond, pointing to a heap of cloth-covered volumes. "What have you been doing with yourself since I saw you last? No good, I suppose," he added, without looking

up from the proofs on which he was operating.

"Well, no, not much good. It's a business I shouldn't care about repeating; but it's a business that must be done—it must be done, Desmond, sooner or later, in every man's life, I suppose."

The unwonted gravity of Daniel Mayfield's tone surprised his friend. Laurence Desmond looked up from his desk, and for the first time perceived the change in his errratic contributor's costume.

"In mourning, Dan! I'm sorry to see that," he said, gently.

"Yes; I have buried the dearest friend I ever had—my only sister. God bless her! The *Freethinker's Quarterly* people won't get me to do any more deistical articles for them, Laurence. I'm a bad fellow myself, with no opinions in particular about anything in heaven or earth. How should I have opinions? I've sold 'em too often to other people to have any left for myself. But I like to think that *she* is

in heaven, and I'll never write a 'rational' essay again as long as I live."

The two men shook hands upon this, *without* effusion—as it is the habit of Englishmen to do.

"And now to business," said Daniel. "You once offered to get me a government appointment, and I told you I wasn't fit for one. I haven't forgotten your offer, or the kindness that prompted it. My sister has left a son—a lad of three-and-twenty. He is clever, honourable, ambitious, and indefatigable; but, except myself, he has neither friend nor relative in the world. He has been a tutor in a great Belgian academy, and the principal will certify his merits. If you can serve him, Desmond, you will do me treble service."

"What kind of thing do you want for him?'

"A private tutorship, or the post of secretary to a man worth serving. The lad is a fair classical scholar, and a good linguist. He is a great deal more than this into the bargain; but I am so fond of the fellow that I am afraid of praising him too much."

"Bring him here to dine to-morrow night," said Mr. Desmond; "I'll think the matter over in the meantime. I dare say I shall hit upon something to suit him. Why doesn't he take to this sort of thing?"

The editor of the *Areopagus* laid his hand upon the proofs.

Daniel Mayfield shook his head sadly.

"Anything but that, Desmond. I don't want him to be a publisher's hack. I don't want him to put my worn-out old shoes on his brave young feet, and tread the miry road along which I have travelled. I don't want him to make merchandise of his best and purest feelings while the stock lasts him, and deal in sham sentiments and spurious emotions when the real ones are worn out. I don't want him to weep maudlin tears over philanthropic leaders, or work himself into an unreal fury over the denunciation of a political measure he has barely had leisure to consider. I don't want him to sell his convictions to the highest bidder—to be Conservative one day,

Liberal the next, and Radical the day after. He's too good for my work, Desmond, and he's too good for my company. When he was old enough to be injured by a bad example, his poor mother took him away from me—though I was sorry enough to part with the little rascal, and it went to her heart to give me sorrow. She is gone now, Desmond, and it is my duty to see that the boy comes to no harm."

"Has he any of your talent, Dan?"

"He has something better than my talent, sir," answered Mayfield, gravely. "The lad has the soul of a poet, and is destined to be one. There is real genius there, sir—not the marketable trash I deal in. He has written verses which have brought the tears into my eyes; consider that, sir—tears from such a hardened wretch as your Daniel should count for something. I want some quiet, comfortable position for him, in which he will have a little leisure to think his own thoughts. I want him to bide his time; and some day, when his intellect has ripened and mellowed, the divine

breath will inflate his nostrils, and we shall have a new poet."

"I think I can get him exactly the sort of thing you want," answered Laurence Desmond; "but I must first make sure he is fit for it. Bring him at half-past seven to-morrow, and let me see if he is worthy of your praises. You'll take those books, and send me copy to-morrow, eh?"

Daniel nodded, took the books under his arm, shook hands with his friend, and departed—departed, with peace and goodwill and all Christian feelings in his big, generous heart, to annihilate the luckless wretch who had written a stupid novel.

Daniel and Eustace dined in the Temple the next evening, and sat late over their wine in the summer twilight. Laurence Desmond was delighted with the young man. He led him on to talk freely on his own sentiments and opinions, while Daniel listened with a fond smile to his nephew's eloquent discourse. It was

pleasant to Mr. Desmond, whose lot had been cast in that serene and exalted sphere in which there was no such thing as emotion—it was very pleasant to the popular editor to come in contact with this fresh, young nature, and to discover that, even in this age of high-pressure, a man may retain youthfulness of spirit, faith in his fellow-creatures, pure and poetic aspirations, and childlike simplicity of feeling, after his twenty-third birthday.

"The young men I know have been used up at nineteen," thought Laurence; "and there are hardened wretches of five-and-twenty more *blasé* than Philip of Orleans at forty-eight."

From talking of his opinions, Laurence Desmond led Eustace on to talk of himself and his own experiences; and before Daniel and his nephew departed, the young man's future was in some measure provided for.

"A very old and dear friend of mine," said Mr. Desmond, "has for some time been in want of a secretary and amanuensis to assist him in the completion and publication of a

great work to which he has devoted many years of his life—a work which he calls the *History of Superstition*, and which, I believe, is as dear to him as his only child. I have been trying to find him the kind of person he wants, but have hitherto failed most completely. There are plenty of shallow, flippant young fellows who would like the position well enough, for the salary will be a decent one, and my friend is the best and kindest of men; but, until now, I have met no one capable of giving him the assistance he wants. Your knowledge of languages and your Villebrumeuse reading—which seems to have been very wisely chosen,—exactly fit you for the position. If you can tolerate a quiet life in the heart of the country, I can offer you the situation, Mr. Thorburn, and may conclude all arrangements with you, on my own responsibility."

"If your friend is a gentleman, I say 'Done!'" cried Daniel Mayfield, heartily; "nothing could be better suited to this boy."

He laid his hand caressingly on the young man's shoulder as he spoke.

"And you'll be safe out of my way, lad," he murmured, softly, "and I shall lose my bright-faced boy—so much the better for him, so much the worse for me!"

"My friend is something more than a gentleman," answered Laurence Desmond. He is a *preux chevalier*. He is the descendant of a noble old Spanish family—a Frenchman by birth and education, and half an Englishman by long residence in England. He lives in a picturesque old house near Windsor, and on the banks of the Thames; such a spot as one scarcely expects to see out of Creswick's pictures. I don't see much of him, for my life is too busy for friendship; and—and there are other reasons that keep us asunder," added Mr. Desmond, with some slight embarrassment of manner.

"Can you exist in the country, Mr. Thorburn?" he asked presently.

"I love the country so well that I can

scarcely exist in London, except for the sake of my uncle's society."

"Which is about the worst thing you can have!" growled Daniel.

"Ah! you are a poet, and a poet should live amongst lonely woods and sylvan streams. Well, you will be delighted with my friend, Theodore de Bergerac, and still more delighted with the place he lives in. I'll write to him to-morrow, and tell him I've found the blue diamond of the nineteenth century, a young man who does not affect to be old. Can you go to him immediately?"

"M. de Bergerac will no doubt wish to hear from my late employer, the principal of the Parthenée," Eustace answered, after some hesitation.

"Not at all. I will be responsible for the character and qualifications of my old friend's nephew. There need be no delay on that account," said Laurence.

"There need be no delay on any account, then," exclaimed Daniel; "the boy is ready to leave London to-morrow, if necessary."

"I beg your pardon, Uncle Dan. Unless M. de Bergerac really wants me immediately, I should be glad of a week's delay," said Eustace, with considerable embarrassment. "I have some business to do before I leave London."

"Business!" cried Daniel; "what business?"

"I will tell you all about it by and by, Uncle Dan."

"My friend has waited six months, and he can afford to wait another week," said Laurence, good-naturedly. "Come and see me when your business is finished, Mr. Thorburn."

"Good-night, and thank you, Desmond," said Daniel, wringing his friend's hand with muscular heartiness. "I told you that a favour to him is thrice a favour to me; and if ever I have a chance of proving that I meant what I said, I won't let the opportunity slip."

When the two men had left the Temple, and were walking homewards through quiet back-streets, Daniel Mayfield turned sharply upon his nephew.

"What the deuce is to keep you in London for a week, Eustace?" he asked.

"I want to go to Bayham, Uncle Dan, to make some inquires that may help me."

Daniel laid his hand on the young man's arm.

"Drop that, lad," he said, earnestly. "I've thought about it for twenty years to no end. No good will ever come of it—nothing but disappointment and vexation, shame and sorrow. Forget the past, and start fair; the world is all before you. You have got your chance now. Desmond is a friend worth having; and this man De Bergerac may be a good friend too, if you serve him well. Wipe out the memory of that old story, my lad. Your father has chosen to ignore you; ignore him, and cry quits. The day may come when he'll hear your name, and regret that he has forfeited the right to call you his son. Don't waste your thoughts upon him, Eustace. The man may be dead and gone for aught we know. Let him rest."

"And my mother's wrongs—are they to be forgotten? Do you remember the other evening in Highgate Cemetery, Uncle Dan? You thought I was praying, perhaps, when I knelt by my mother's grave; but I was not praying. On my knees beside that newly laid turf I swore to be revenged on the man who blighted the life of her who lies beneath it. I must find that man, Uncle Daniel, and you must help me to find him."

"Was there no clue to his identity to be found in those letters?" asked Daniel, after a pause.

"Only one, and that a very slight one. He had written a book,—a book which seems to have been popular, and which my poor mother was reading when first he saw her. Can you remember any particular book which attracted attention in '43?"

"No, my lad; my memory is not good enough for that. There are people who might be able to remember, and there are literary papers that might help you. But scarcely a year goes

by in which there are not a dozen books that make some slight sensation. This must have been a woman's book, though,—a poem or a novel, or something of that kind, — or your mother would scarcely have been reading it."

"The book was published either anonymously or under some *nom de plume*," said Eustace; "and even if I discover the right book, I may not be able to identify it with the writer. So you see the clue is a very poor one. I shall go to Bayham, Uncle Dan. Accident may help me to some better clue than the letters afford. The man was staying at the George Hotel; I may make some discovery there. He speaks of a Miss K., a friend and confidante of my mother. Can you tell me who she was?"

"Sarah Kimber!" cried Daniel, — "undoubtedly Sarah Kimber, a girl whose father kept a linendraper's shop, and who went to school with Celia. My poor sister and she were fast friends; but I never could endure

her. She was a lank, lantern-jawed, whitey-brown girl, and I always thought her deceitful. Good God! how the old time comes back as you talk to me! I can see the little parlour at Bayham, and those two girls seated side by side on an old-fashioned chintz-covered sofa, with an open window and a green trellis-work of honeysuckle and jasmin behind them. I can see it all, Eustace, as fresh and vivid as a picture at a private view—Celia so bright and lovely; that Kimber girl an unconscious foil to her beauty."

"Do you know if this Miss Kimber is still alive?"

"No, lad. Bayham may lie fathoms deep beneath the sea, like the mystic city of Lyonesse, for anything I know. I have never been there since the day of my mother's funeral."

"I shall try to find Miss Kimber, Uncle Dan. She may be able to tell me a great deal."

"As you will, dear boy. If you took poor

old Dan's advice, you would let the story rest. But youth is fiery and impetuous, and must take its own course. If ever you do find *that man*, Eustace, let me know his name, for he and I have a heavy reckoning to settle."

CHAPTER VI.

AT BAYHAM.

Eustace Thorburn went to Bayham, and took up his quarters at the George Hotel. The Dorsetshire watering-place had once been fashionable; but its fashion had departed, and an atmosphere of decay pervaded the grandeurs of that bygone day. Happily, the departure of fashion, which had never had any hand in the loveliness of the bay and the broad yellow sands, had robbed the Bayham shore of no grace or charm. The changing opal waters retained their brightest hues, though only west-country gentry came to look upon them. The golden sands were golden still, though the crystal chandeliers and sconces which had once adorned the assembly-room had been sold by auction, and the room itself converted into a Baptist chapel.

There had been many changes at the George within the last twenty years. That once popular establishment had been superseded by a gigantic, stuccoed railway-hotel—itself a dismal failure—and the last two proprietors had been insolvent. Eustace Thorburn sought in vain for a visitors' book dated '43. All such books had been sold for waste paper years ago, and the only creature to be found in the hotel who had belonged to the same establishment in the year '43 was a semi-idiotic ostler. Eustace abandoned all hope of information in this quarter, and went out into the little seaside town to look for the house in which his mother's childhood had been spent.

He found the place easily enough. It was still a circulating-library and reading-room, and as he lingered before the gaily decorated window, Eustace Thorburn could fancy that nameless stranger, who dated his letters from the George, peering between the lithographs and sheets of music in the hope of seeing Celia Mayfield's fair young face.

"Why could not an honest man have fallen in love with her?" he asked himself, savagely. "Why must it needs be a villain who was first to discover the charm of her innocent beauty?"

He went into the shop. There was a girl sitting behind the counter, half hidden by a high desk, and busy with some shred of needlework. The young man pictured his mother sitting in the same spot, and all of a sudden the face and figure of the girl grew dim and blurred before his eyes. He was fain to look about him for a few moments, as if seeking some special object, before he could trust himself to speak. Then he asked for some stationery, and contrived to occupy the girl for a considerable time, while he selected what he wanted, and questioned her about the townsfolk.

"Was there any person of the name of Kimber still living in Bayham?" he asked. The girl told him that there were several Kimbers: Mr. Kimber, the plumber, in New Street; Mr. Kimber, the house-agent, at the corner of the

Parade; and Kimber and Willows, the drapers, in High Street.

"The person I wish to find is, or was, a Miss Kimber—Sarah Kimber," said Eustace; "and I believe her father was a draper."

"Ah!" exclaimed the damsel; "then that is the Miss Kimber who married Mr. Willows. Mr. Willows was head-assistant to old Mr. Kimber, who died five years ago. He left all his money and his business to Miss Kimber—being his only daughter, you see, sir; and as soon as she left off her mourning, she married Mr. Willows. He is a very handsome man, Mr. Willows, and nearly ten years younger than Miss Kimber that was, and they do say Mr. and Mrs. Willows do not live happily together."

Eustace went straight from the library to the establishment of Messrs. Kimber and Willows. It was a big, glaring shop, with a great deal of plate-glass and gilding, and a gaudy display of dresses and ribbons, bonnets and parasols. A smirking young man pounced

immediately upon the stranger, asking what he might please to want; and by him Eustace was conducted to Mrs. Willows, who sat at a desk at the end of the shop, in a perfect bower of ribbons and millinery. She was attended by a bevy of damsels, who were busied in the construction of caps and bonnets, and whom she addressed with extreme acidity of tone and manner. She was not a pleasant-looking person; and if old Mr. Kimber's money had changed into withered leaves on her inheritance of it, she could scarcely have seemed to have profited less by the dead man's wealth, so pinched and hungry was her aspect.

She favoured Eustace with the nearest approach to a smile of which her thin lips were capable, but regarded him with evident suspicion when she heard that he wished for a private interview.

"If you are travelling in the drapery lin e you needn't trouble yourself to show your patterns," she said, decisively; "we have dealt with Grossam and Grinder for the last twenty

years, and we never take goods from strangers. There are some new people on the other side of the way who may wish to deal with you, if you'll give them long credit and take their bill for your goods, I dare say; but I don't recommend you to trust them. When people come into a town without sixpence of capital, and try to undersell an old-established house, they have only themselves to blame if they get into the *Gazette*. However, *I* say nothing; it's no affair of *mine*. The increase of our business is wearing me to the grave, and I should be the last to begrudge new people a chance, however unfair *their* way of proceeding may be."

Eustace had been quite unable to stay this torrent of indignation against the people on the other side of the street; but when Mrs. Willows paused to take breath, he informed her that he was not a commercial traveller, and that he had nothing to do with drapery, either wholesale or retail.

"I very much wish to obtain a few minutes' conversation with you in private," he said,

glancing towards the young milliners, who had honoured him with a furtive scrutiny while Mrs. Willows was not looking at them, and had returned to their work with an exaggerated appearance of industry directly they felt her cold gray eyes upon them.

That important personage hesitated. It was rather an agreeable sensation to have a handsome young man pleading for a private interview, and she looked towards the other end of the shop, where her husband was displaying cotton prints to an elderly customer of the housekeeper class, with the faint hope of awakening in that gentleman's breast some twinge of the jealousy which so often racked her own.

"If you will step upstairs to the drawing-room," she said to Eustace, "you can explain your business without interruption."

Eustace followed Mrs. Willows to an apartment on the first floor, an apartment which was made splendid by a great deal of bead-work, and by occasional glimpses of a very

gaudy Brussels carpet; but the splendour whereof was somewhat subdued by chaste coverings of brown holland and crochet-work.

The linendraperess seated herself in one of the holland-covered arm-chairs, and arranged the rustling folds of her stiff silk dress. Having settled herself deliberately thus, she sat looking at Eustace with her hard gray eyes, waiting for him to speak.

And this had been his mother's friend, this hard, prosperous, vulgar woman! they had been girls together, and had shared all manner of simple, girlish pleasures! Eustace looked at the woman sadly, thinking how wide a difference there must needs have been between the two girls, and how little real sympathy or womanly tenderness could have ever softened the heart of Mrs. Willows.

"I have to apologize for this intrusion," he said, after a pause; "for the business that brings me to Bayham is a personal matter, which can have very little interest for you. I am anxious to obtain all possible information

respecting a family of the name of Mayfield, and more especially Miss Mayfield, the only daughter of a librarian in this town, who, I am given to understand, was very intimate with you some four-and-twenty years ago."

The lady's mouth, tight and hard at the best of times, tightened and hardened itself to an abnormal degree as Eustace said this. A pale fire kindled in the cold, gray eyes, and the stiff shoulders and elbows adjusted themselves anew with increased stiffness.

"Yes," said Mrs. Willows, "I knew Celia Mayfield."

"You and she were friends, I believe?"

"We were *companions*," replied Mrs. Willows, with spiteful promptitude. "Even at this distance of time I should blush to own that Celia Mayfield and I were ever friends."

The whitey-brown complexion of the draper's wife seemed incapable of anything approaching a blush; but Eustace's face glowed with an angry crimson as the woman said this.

"May I inquire *why* you would be ashamed

to confess your friendship for Miss Mayfield?" he asked, his voice tremulous with suppressed passion. It was so difficult to sit quietly by while a spiteful woman belied his mother's name; it was so difficult to refrain from crying out: "I am her son, and am ready to uphold her as the best and purest of women!" And to own himself her son, would have been to betray the sad secret of her hapless life.

"May I ask what reason you have to be ashamed of your girlish friendship?" he repeated, in steadier tones, when he had waited some moments for Mrs. Willows' reply.

"Because Celia Mayfield's conduct was shameful," answered the woman; "though, goodness knows, it's not much wonder that a girl who had been spoiled, and petted, and flattered, until she didn't know whether she stood on her head or her heels, *did* turn out badly. Mr. and Mrs. Mayfield made a fool of their daughter. *I* was an only daughter, and an only child, too, for the matter of that; but my father was a sensible man, and *I* was

never brought up to read novels and think myself a beauty. I kept house for my poor pa when I was fourteen years of age; and if there was a halfpenny wrong in my accounts, he didn't hesitate to box my ears. And I feel the benefit of it now," added Mrs. Willows, triumphantly. "This business would not be what it is if my father's property had been left to a frivolous person."

"And you considered Miss Mayfield a frivolous person?"

"Frivolous to a degree that makes me wonder I could ever waste my time in her company."

"Will you do me the favour to tell me all you know of the circumstances under which Miss Mayfield left her home?" said Eustace. "I can assure you that my motive for making these inquiries is no idle or unworthy one. You will be doing me a great service if you will give me what information you can in relation to this subject."

"If you put it in that manner, I will tell you

all I know," answered Mrs. Willows, "though it is not a pleasant subject—especially to me, who might have suffered by Celia Mayfield's conduct. Goodness knows what people might have said of *me* if my pa's position in Bayham hadn't been what it was."

There was a pause, during which the woman rearranged her silk dress, and then she began her friend's story with a stony face, and extreme deliberation of manner.

"I suppose you are aware that Celia Mayfield ran away from her home with a gentleman called Hardwick, or at least calling himself Hardwick, who was staying at the George Hotel when he became acquainted with her, and who it was easy to see was very much above her in station. Indeed, how she could ever bring herself to think that he would marry her, would be a mystery to me if I did not know how her vanity had been fostered and her looks praised by people who ought to have known better. She did think so; and when I warned her of the danger her imprudent conduct might lead

her into, she persuaded me to think the same. 'Very well, Celia,' I said; 'you know best; but it isn't often that a gentleman whose pa is in parliament marries the daughter of a stationer.' He had let it slip that his father was a member of parliament, and he had let many things slip which proved that he belonged to rich people and to high people."

"He was a young man, I believe?"

"Five-and-twenty at most, and very handsome."

As Mrs. Willows pronounced these words, her gaze became suddenly fixed, and she sat staring at her visitor with an expression of extreme astonishment.

"Perhaps you are related to him?" she said, interrogatively.

"I never saw him in my life. But why do you ask the question?"

"Because you are like him. I didn't notice the resemblance until just now; for it's so long since I saw him that I'd almost forgotten what he was like. But as I spoke to you his face

came back to me. Yes, you are very like him. And you are really not related?"

"I tell you again, Mrs. Willows, that I never saw this man in my life. It is the Mayfield family in which I am interested. Pray go on with your story."

The beating of his heart quickened as he spoke. He had discovered something at least from this woman. It was something to know that he resembled the nameless father who had abandoned him.

"The likeness between us is a birthright of which he could not rob me," thought the young man; "or he would have deprived me of that, as well as of the rest."

"I believe the gentleman had written a book," resumed Mrs. Willows: "a story, or a novel, or something of that kind. Celia went on about it in her childish way. It was the most beautiful story that ever was written, and so on, she said. My poor pa forbade me reading novels, and I had to give my solemn promise that no book from the circulating-library should ever

enter this house, before he would allow me to walk out with Celia Mayfield. When she began to read the book, she didn't know anything about the author; but while she was reading it, he happened to go into the shop, and she went on about the story to him as she had gone on about it to me; and I suppose his vanity was flattered by her childish talk, for there never was such a childish creature about books and flowers and birds. He told her that he had written the book; and then he wrote to her, first a note, which was delivered by his servant, who hung about the library until he got the opportunity of giving it to Celia unknown to any one; and then letters, which were addressed to the post-office: and she showed me the letters. I said, 'Celia, these are not letters which a prudent young woman ought to receive.' But it was no use talking to her. The first letter that was sent to the post-office lay there nearly a fortnight before she went to fetch it; and all that time she went on about it to me when we were out walking; for he had told her he should

write, and address his letter to the post-office. Should she fetch it, or shouldn't she? I said, 'If you take my advice, Celia, you will have nothing to do with it. People who mean honourably don't send their letters to post-offices.' But one evening, when we were coming home from a walk, we passed through the street where the office is; and she let go my arm all of a sudden, ran into the shop, and came out with a letter in her hand. As soon as we turned the corner into a bye-lane, where there was nobody about, she kissed the letter, and went on like a mad thing, and then she read it to me; and she was as proud and happy as if a king had written to her."

"God help her, poor innocent soul!" murmured Eustace, tenderly.

"I don't know what you call *innocence*," exclaimed the matron, with severity; "but if you consider *that* the conduct of a prudent young woman, I do not. The end of the story proved that I was right. Celia and I had been in the habit of walking on the sands in a sheltered

place beyond the bay, where there was very little company, and where two young women could walk together without being followed or stared at. We walked there almost every evening when it was fine, and the gentleman at the George used to meet us there, and talk to Celia. I told her that I disapproved of these meetings; but she had a way of talking people over, and she talked me over, and made me believe what she believed. If the gentleman really wanted to marry her, there could be no harm in her meeting him in the company of a young female friend. Things went on like this for some time, and then, when the summer season was quite over, the gentleman went away. Celia fretted a great deal; but she told me he was coming back in the winter to see her father and to explain everything, and there'd be an end to all secresy. I said, 'Celia, don't build upon his coming back. It's not my wish to make you unhappy; but, if you take *my* advice, you'll forget all about him.'"

"But he did return?"

"I suppose he did, though I never saw him after the summer. I gave Celia Mayfield good advice, and she wasn't pleased to hear it. We had some words upon the subject; and as my pa's position was very superior to Mr. Mayfield's, it was not likely I should suffer myself to be put upon by his daughter. When Celia wanted to make friends with me, I declined; and from that time we never spoke. I sat under Mr. Slowcome, at the Baptist chapel in Walham Lane, and Celia Mayfield attended the parish-church; so we didn't often meet. When we did meet, Celia used to look at me in her childish way, as if she wanted to be friends; but I made a point of looking straight before me. I heard nothing more of the Mayfields until one morning in the winter, when a young person came into our shop and told me that Celia had run away from home."

"Was the manner of her leaving generally known?"

"It was not. The Mayfields kept things very close. There was a great deal of talk, as

you may suppose, and people had their opinions; but nothing was ever known for certain; and from that time to this I have never set eyes on Celia Mayfield."

"And you never will," said Eustace, solemnly. "She is dead."

Mrs. Willows murmured an expression of surprise. Her hard, grim face softened a little, and when she spoke again, her tone was less severe.

"I am sorry to hear that," she said. "I never expected to meet Celia Mayfield again; but I am sorry to hear that she is dead."

Even for this hard nature the sanctity of the grave had some softening influence. The linen-draper's wife could afford to think a little more indulgently of the spoiled and petted beauty whose loveliness had been so bitter to her, now that she knew her rival had passed into those shadowy regions where earthly charms count for so little. Some faint touch of tenderness, some memory of her own youth—when Bayham was gayer and more pleasant, and even the sands

and the sea had seemed brighter to her than now—came back to the grim, purse-proud tradeswoman, and one solitary tear glittered in her stern, gray eye. She brushed it away quickly, ashamed of the human emotion.

"You can tell me nothing more respecting the man who lured your friend from her home?"

"Nothing. Celia told me that the name by which we knew him was an assumed one, but she never told me his real name. I don't believe that even she knew it. She told me that he was very grand and very rich; and it was easy for any one to discover from his conversation that he was a gentleman, and had travelled half over the world."

"Do you remember the title of the book that he had written?"

Mrs. Willows shook her head.

"In one or more volumes?"

"In one volume. I have seen it in Celia's hand. Mr. Hardwick gave her a copy of it, bound in green morocco."

"Had Miss Mayfield any other friend than yourself?" Eustace asked, after a brief pause. "Was there any one else in whom she would have been likely to confide?"

"No one else. Society in Bayham is very limited. Mr. Mayfield was so wrapped up in his daughter, and had such high ideas, on account of being the son of a clergyman, that he scarcely thought any one good enough to associate with her. I was Celia's only female friend."

"I hope you will think more tenderly of her in future," said Eustace, gently; "she is now beyond all human praise or blame, and the turf will lie none the less lightly above her grave, let the world judge her never so harshly. But I, who knew her and loved her, would like to think that the companion of her youth remembered her kindly."

A second solitary tear bedewed the eye of Mrs. Willows.

"I'm sure I bear no malice," she said, in an injured tone. "If Celia and I were at

variance for some months before she left, it was more her fault than mine, for I gave her the best advice, and gave it with the best intentions. But I am quite willing to forget all that. Do you know if the gentleman who called himself Mr. Hardwick really did marry her? People in Bayham concluded, by her not coming back, that she was altogether deceived and deluded by his fine promises; and it was said her father's heart was broken by her conduct. He died very soon after, as you may be aware; and his wife did not long survive him."

"I know very little of your friend's sad story," answered Eustace; "but I know that her life for twenty years was as pure as the life of an angel—as self-denying as that of a saint."

There was no more to be said. Eustace thanked Mrs. Willows for her compliance with his wishes, and took his departure. He went out into the High Street of Bayham very little wiser than when he had entered the prosperous

emporium of Kimber and Willows. He walked slowly along the quiet street, and found himself by and by on the outskirts of the town, strolling onward in an objectless manner, and meditating upon his mother's broken story.

When he paused for the first time to look about him he was face to face with the sea. Behind him a terrace of white houses reflected the full blaze of the southern sun. Before him lay the bay—a wide expanse of tawny sand, with pools of sunlit water glimmering here and there.

The tide was low, and the sandy amphitheatre lay open to the foot of the pedestrian. On one side of the bay rose a tall cliff; on the other a stretch of sand lay beyond the jutting line of rocks. Eustace crossed the bay in this direction. He wanted to see the place in which Celia Mayfield had walked with her false lover, and he knew that this lonely stretch of sand beyond the rocks must be the spot alluded to in his father's letters, and mentioned that day by Mrs. Willows.

It was a fit spot for a lovers' trysting-place —remote from the voices of the little town, and yet within the sound of church-bells, which took a silvery tone as they floated hitherward across the rippling water. Summer visitors to Bayham rarely penetrated beyond the screen of rocks which sheltered the bay, and this smooth stretch of sand was not often invaded by the spades and barrows of noisy children or the feet of idle damsels. It was an enchanted cove, which might have been sacred to the sea-nymphs, so seldom did human creatures disturb its poetic calm.

Here Eustace lingered for some time, still meditating the story of his mother's youth, and with strangely intermingled feelings of tenderness and anger in his heart. How could he ever think of *her* with sufficient love and pity? How could he ever think of her destroyer without considering how he should avenge her wrongs?

"So trusting, so childlike, and deceived so cruelly! What a villain he must have been!

what an unutterable villain!" thought Celia's son, as he contemplated the scene of his mother's love-story. It should have been such a sweet idyll—a modern fairy tale of rustic beauty and princely truth and chivalry—and it had been instead so dark a history of falsehood and shame.

The sun was low in the west when Eustace left that lonely sea-shore. He had been walking there for hours, indifferent alike to the progress of time and to the fact that he had eaten nothing since nine o'clock that morning. And after leaving the sands he did not return immediately to his hotel, but made his way to the parish churchyard, guided by the old Norman tower, which stood out in sombre relief against a rosy evening sky. There was just light enough to serve him in his search amongst the tombstones; nor was he long finding that which he sought—a tall, white head-stone, standing near the low wall which bounded the crowded burial-place. The churchyard stood on rising ground; and the irregular roofs and

chimneys of the town, with here and there a glimpse of foliage, and the broad purple sea for a background, made no unlovely picture in the soft evening light.

Eustace knelt upon the grass beside the simple grave, and in that pious attitude read the inscription on the head-stone :

Sacred to the Memory
OF
EUSTACE THORBURN MAYFIELD,
YOUNGEST SON OF THE LATE SAMUEL MAYFIELD, CURATE OF ASHE, IN THIS COUNTY,
Obiit April 3, 1846, ætat. 52;
AND OF
MARY CELIA,
HIS WIDOW, SECOND DAUGHTER OF THE LATE MR. JAMES HOWDEN, FARMER,
Obiit February 1, 1847, ætat. 49.
This stone is erected by their affectionate children.

"Have I any right to think of them as my grandfather and my grandmother?" the young man asked himself. "The law would tell me no. But I take my stand upon a higher law than that made by political economists, and claim the right to call these my kindred, and to avenge their injuries."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. JERNINGHAM'S GUEST.

Theodore de Bergerac and Harold Jerningham were friends of thirty years' standing. There was some distant relationship between them—some remote cousinship arising from the marriage of an exiled Jerningham of Jacobite principles with a De Bergerac, in the reign of George the Second. But this inscrutable cousinship had nothing to do with the friendship between the two men. *That* was a sincere and spontaneous affection, such as exists now and then between two people as different from each other as it is possible for creatures of the same species to be. Harold was ten years younger than his friend in actual years, and his senior by a century in all qualities of heart and mind. The elder man retained the freshness and sim-

plicity of a child at sixty years of age; the younger had parted with every attribute of youth before the advent of his twenty-fifth birthday. Both were highly gifted: but one had scattered the treasures of intellect on every road, and wasted the powers of his brain in a hundred ignoble pursuits; while the other had enriched his mind unconsciously in the calm seclusion of a scholar's retreat. An angel might have read the innermost secrets of Theodore de Bergerac's heart, and would have found therein no taint of earthly grossness; but there had been times when devils might have rejoiced in the thoughts of Harold Jerningham. And yet the two men were friends, and had preserved an unbroken friendship for nearly thirty years. A Philip of Orleans, steeped to the very lips in the poisonous teaching of a Dubois, will in the hour of his deepest degradation respect the purity of childhood. Before the stainless robes of perfect innocence the most hardened profligate bows his head and covers his face, ashamed of the vices he is wont to be proud of—softened,

melted, vanquished by that invincible purity. Thus it had been with Harold Jerningham. For this world-weary, hardened sinner the simple-minded scholar was sacred as a child. De Bergerac knew nothing of that Jerningham of the bachelor's house in Park Lane : Jerningham the irresistible, the man who was an exile from the houses of careful fathers and devoted husbands ; the man whose life would have furnished subject-matter for half a dozen romances and more than one tragedy. When Harold Jerningham entered his friend's house he put away the baser half of himself. A little cynical, a little bitter, a little hard and worldly he must needs be, even in that innocent society ; but Jerningham the free-thinker and the profligate melted into thin air on the threshold of Theodore de Bergerac's dwelling.

The two friends did not meet very often, though the house which Theodore de Bergerac had occupied ever since his first coming to England stood on the border of Mr. Jerningham's park in Berkshire,—a grand old park, in

the midst of which there was a great house that had once been splendid, but about which there was now a certain air of shabbiness and decay. How should a mansion preserve its warmth and grandeur when the master crossed its threshold so rarely, and during his brief visits preferred a couple of dingy chambers on the ground-floor to that spacious suite of apartments, with panelled walls and painted ceilings, in which his forefathers had held their state?

M. de Bergerac was a warm partizan of the Orleans family, and in the revolution of '48 had turned his back upon his father's country. He had come straight to England, where he had found a fair young English wife in the person of a Berkshire curate's eldest daughter, and had accepted the hospitality of his friend, Mr. Jerningham, so far as to occupy an old-fashioned farm-house on the borders of the park—a house which had been built for a bailiff in the days of some departed Jerningham, but which had long fallen into disuse. Harold would fain have persuaded the exile to

take up his quarters in the big house, with all the lazy, over-fed retainers at his disposal; but De Bergerac ridiculed his friend's offer.

"What should I do with your thirty bedchambers," he wrote in answer to Harold's letter of invitation, "and your great corridors, along which one could drive a coach-and-pair, and your housekeeper in a stiff silk gown, and all your grooms and hangers-on? I would as soon live in the palace of Versailles. Even kings and queens grow tired of their palaces, you will perceive; and the man who has sunk millions in the creation of a Versailles must needs seek domestic comfort at Marly. You cannot endure your howling wilderness yourself,—you, who have been accustomed to splendid habitations,—and yet ask me to take up my abode in your thirty bedchambers, and abandon myself to the tyranny of your awful housekeeper. No, my dear Jerningham; give me the little Trianon—that tumble-down old farm-house you showed me last year, in the midst of a quaint Dutch flower-garden—and I

shall be happy. All I want is a room big enough and dry enough to hold my books, and I will not envy your gracious Queen her pompous château of Windsor."

So the scholar and lover of books came to the farm-house, which Harold Jerningham had taken care to make weather-tight and snug before the exile's arrival. De Bergerac recognized the handiwork of his friend in the arrangement of this comfortable English hermitage. There were a few rare old Dutch pictures, a small head by Holbein, a highly-finished little bit by Canaletti, hanging in the oak-panelled parlour, which no farm-bailiff had been privileged to gaze upon. There were quaint little inlaid cabinets between the windows, with that delightful shabbiness of aspect and mellow depth of tint which distinguishes the treasures of Christie and Manson's sale-room from the glaring freshness of modern marqueterie. And on the cabinets were fragile odds and ends of Derby and Worcester, Chelsea and Battersea, intermingled with those

dingy-looking bronzes and intaglios which the soul of the collector loveth. And the biggest room in the old farm-house, once a kitchen, had been lined from floor to ceiling with carved oaken shelves, for the reception of the new-comer's library; while the great yawning fire-place, in which hinds and shepherds had supped their evening ale, and roasted their sturdy legs, in the days that were gone, was now lined with encaustic tiles, and furnished with a modern-antique grate of black iron-work and glittering steel. When Harold Jerningham was pleased to be generous, he obeyed his impulses in a princely fashion. He was not a good man; but his vices and virtues were alike of the *vieille roche*, and were instinct with a kind of dignity. Let Lucifer fall never so low, he is the prince of devils still, and will show himself grander in his debasement than fiends of meaner rank.

The country-people in the neighbourhood of Greenlands were ready to receive M. de Bergerac with open arms: but he did not often avail himself of their friendly hospitality. He

was serenely happy among his books and manuscripts, in the chamber which his friend had beautified for him, and had no thought of seeking any other kind of happiness. The great scheme of his life, the very beginning and end of his existence, was the completion of a book which was to supply an existing void in the world of books. To this achievement he devoted his days and nights, choosing all his reading with reference to his one great scheme. The subject possessed unfailing fascination for the mind of the scholar. It was an inexhaustible quarry, rich with gems of purest water; and De Bergerac dug patiently for the precious jewels, content to let the years slip past him unmarked, save by the slow growth of his mighty treatise. When the work seemed ripening, and the hour of its completion near at hand, the scholar trembled, for he remembered Gibbon's walk in the moonlit garden at Lausanne, and the desolation which came down upon the worker when he felt that his task was finished. Happily, the hour of completion,

which De Bergerac dreaded, was very slow to come. There was an end to the history of ancient Rome; but it appeared, at times, as if there could be no end to the history of superstition.

The exile had passed his fortieth birthday, and had been but six months in England, when he married a fair young English girl—in a fit of absence of mind, said the ignorant, who tried to account for this unexpected alliance. But Harold Jerningham fathomed the secret of his friend's marriage. The girl was the daughter of a curate, an old Orientalist, of whose reading De Bergerac had gladly availed himself for his beloved work, and in whose pleasant cottage he had therefore been a constant visitor. The curate's daughter had been charmed out of the dullness of her life by the society of the courteous exile; and from looking up to him with reverential tenderness as a mentor and friend, she had unconsciously grown to regard him with a deeper and more tender feeling than that gentle, womanly friendship. A tone, a look, an im-

perceptible something not to be defined by words, revealed this feeling to De Bergerac before the girl was fully aware of it herself; and could he be less than grateful, this exile of forty? could his own heart fail to yield to so insidious and innocent an attack? Hence arose this marriage, which was so great a wonder to those who had only a superficial knowledge of the Frenchman's character.

It was a union of perfect happiness. M. de Bergerac's modest income was more than enough for the Arcadian existence which he and his young wife led in the Berkshire farm-house. The curate's daughter was country-bred, and was a fitting mistress for such an establishment. She brought the garden to the rarest perfection of floricultural beauty, and she distinguished herself by the administration of a wonderful poultry-yard. She was as happy as the summer day was long among her simple duties; while he, who in her eyes appeared the greatest of human scholars and the most adorable of men, sat alone in the sacred chamber, which

she entered always with subdued footsteps, as if it had been a religious temple. It was her pride and delight to be useful to the man she loved. She worked for him, and managed for him, and hoarded for him; and he found himself all the richer, even in the matter of sordid cash, for her sweet companionship. The student, looking up from his books and manuscripts, beheld cows grazing in the rich meadow before his window, and was told that the cows were his, and that the produce of those stupid creatures could be transformed into money, with which rare old black-letter volumes and manuscripts of unspeakable value could be bought in London sale-rooms.

For seven years Theodore de Bergerac tasted the perfection of calm domestic happiness, and then the cup was snatched away from him. The bright face faded; the indefatigable housewife was fain to rest from her beloved labours. Little by little the bitter truth—which at first seemed almost an impossibility—came home to the stricken heart of the husband, and he knew

that he was doomed to survive his young wife. The dreaded hour came, and she left him—very lonely without her, but, happily, not quite alone. She left one little girl—a fairer and brighter likeness of herself; and upon this young life the widower set his hopes of earthly happiness.

It was only natural that his unfinished book should become so much the dearer to him by reason of this great human sorrow. The stricken heart refused all comfort, but the agonized mind sought to beguile itself into forgetfulness of pain. The student went back to his books, and buried himself more deeply than of old amidst the ruins and ashes of the past. His days were spent at his desk. His soul, sorely stricken in this lower world of hard realities, wandered away and lost itself in the infinite regions of mythic poetry. As the years crept past him unawares, and his daughter blossomed into early womanhood, and the same bright face peeped in again at his window which had shone upon him in the brief happiness of his married

life, it almost seemed to him as if that terrible anguish, that desolating loss, had been no more than a dreadful dream.

To this man's quiet home Harold Jerningham came sometimes as to a haven of shelter. He was wont to drop in upon the modest Berkshire household unexpectedly, with the bronze of an Oriental sun still upon his face, or a fur coat, in which he had travelled from St. Petersburgh, hanging loosely on his arm. He came hither for rest, for a brief interval of repose from "the fever called living;" and it was here, in the house that had been built for his great-grandfather's bailiff, that the owner of three country-seats and an almost inexhaustible revenue found the nearest approach to happiness which he had experienced during the last twenty years.

Eustace Thorburn's arrangements for beginning his new life were of the simplest order. He found a letter from M. de Bergerac waiting for him on his return to London—such a letter as only a gentleman can write—a letter which

placed the secretary at once on the footing of a friend, and gave him promise of friendly welcome.

The young man spent the last night of his stay in London with Daniel Mayfield. The uncle and nephew dined together at one of those snug little haunts which the literary Bohemian affected, and Daniel's soul expanded under the influence of Chambertin at nine shillings a bottle. He had received a cheque in payment of his latest Massacre of the Innocents in the way of reviewing, and it was in vain that Eustace tried to arrest his extravagant orders.

"The best you can do for us in the shape of dinner, Tom," he said to the waiter, with whom he was on the familiar terms of an *habitué;* "and—let me see the wine-card: yes, Dancer sticks to his old prices, I perceive. What nethermost circle can that man expect to inhabit in the under world, I wonder? Johannisberg with the oysters, Tom: if you were well up in your Charles de Bernard, you would be aware that Chablis is the mistake of the half-educated

diner. After the soup you may give us a bottle of the old Madeira—*the* Madeira, remember—no modern French concoction, flavoured with burnt-sugar. We will not go into sparkling, Tom—sparkling is the luxury of the vulgar; wines that leap and bubble are the pet delusion of the *oi polloi;* we will therefore confine ourselves to the borders of the Rhine. If your still Moselle is worthy of a gentleman's attention, you may bring us a bottle. The Chambertin I know to be tolerable; so after dinner we will stick to *that.*"

Never before had Daniel Mayfield introduced his sister's son to any of the haunts in which the best hours of his own careless life had been wasted. The young man was as temperate as a girl, and the dinner-giver had his carefully chosen wines to himself. But as Mayfield grew gay and eloquent with the warming influence of the Burgundian hillside, Eustace Thorburn's spirits rose in sympathy with his companion. For there is a subtle influence in wine which communicates itself to the man who does not

drink as well as to the man who does; and he must be slow and dull of soul who can sit amongst the worshippers of Bacchus and not feel the fiery presence of the god, let his own beverage be no stronger than water.

"I have never brought you here before, and I should not have brought you here to-night, Eustace," said Daniel, and he passed his newly filled glass of Burgundy beneath his nostrils, with the gesture of a connoisseur; "I should not have brought you here to-night, my lad, pleasant though it is to me to see your bright face across the rosy vapour of the South, if you and I were not going to part company. This is Bohemia, Eustace—the land in which jolly good fellows go to the dogs in their own jolly way—and I'm not quite certain that it's the worst way a man can travel to his ruin. We spend our money, and we live in fear of sheriff's officers, and we die in sponging-houses; but, after all, we escape many of the heartburnings which your very respectable people suffer. We are no shams—we live our own lives; and are our-

selves alone—no phantasmal simulacra of other men. We take existence lightly—share our own good fortune with our needy brothers—and envy no man his luck. But if you have poetic aspirations and noble ambitions, if you want to be a great and a good man, keep clear of us—no great man ever issued from our ranks. We have talent, we have sometimes even genius; but we never achieve. Jones is of the stuff that makes a noble historian; but Jones must have his night in his pet tavern, and a five-pound note at the service of the Pythias of the hour; so he writes showy essays for the magazines. Smith turns his unfinished picture to the wall, in the hour when he was budding into a Rubens, to paint pot-boilers for the fashionable dealers—a young man and woman in a boat off Twickenham, with spinachy foliage and a flimsy blue sky, spotted with little ragged dabs of the palette-knife; or a girl in a striped petticoat playing croquet against a background in which you may count the threads of the canvas. Browne might write a comedy which would re-

mind the critics of Sheridan; but he cannot afford to polish the graceful turns of his dialogue or study the unity of his design, so he does a bad adaptation of a bad French vaudeville, and gets twenty pounds down on the nail for his labour. We possess the elements of greatness; but we can't wait—we want ready money. The man with a wife and seven children may struggle out of poverty into greatness; but for the jolly good-fellow, with half a dozen boon-companions, enduring success is an impossibility."

Eustace had never before heard his uncle speak so seriously of himself and his own set.

"You may do great things yet, Uncle Dan," he said, earnestly; "let me give up this Berkshire engagement, and stop in town to work with you. Cut all the boon-companions, and let us go in earnestly for honest hard work. I want to see your name allied to some perfect book; your talent gets frittered away upon anonymous reviews and essays. Oliver Goldsmith wrote the *Vicar of Wakefield*,

and you know he was something of a Bohemian."

"He was a Bohemian, who lived among such men as Johnson and Burke and Reynolds," answered Daniel; "Bohemia has degenerated since those days. And how many more stories, as perfect as the *Vicar of Wakefield*, might *not* simple-hearted Noll have written if he had not been something of a Bohemian! Your great workers are jog-trot stay-at-home creatures. William Shakespeare was a respectable citizen, who saved money, and settled himself comfortably in his native town before he was my age, and sued his friend for a trifling debt, and made a will in which his domestic carefulness reveals itself by allusions to bedsteads and such-like household furniture; whereby you may perceive the legendary character of all popular records of the poet's youth, for the man who began life by stealing deer and holding horses would never have developed into the bequeather of bedsteads. So no more, lad; I shall hide my light in anonymous essays and reviews as

long as I live, for I shall always be in want of ready money."

"Unless I can make a fortune big enough for us both, Uncle Dan," said the young man, hopefully. At three-and-twenty one fancies it such an easy thing to make a fortune. All the high-roads to the temple of fame radiate before the feet of youth, and it seems a mere matter of choice whether one is to be Shakespeare or Bacon.

"If you made the fortune of a Rothschild or a Pereira, you would never make me a rich man," cried Daniel. "Turn the waters of the Pactolus into my pocket to-day, and before a month is out there will not be left one vestige of the golden river. If I were a second Midas, endowed with the power of changing vulgar wooden chairs and tables into so much solid gold, my friends and companions and the tavern-keepers would take the chairs and tables, and leave me a pauper. I must go my own way, dear boy; and the further my road lies from yours the better for you. Let me hear from you some-

times; and even if your letters are left unanswered, think that they are carried in the pocket nearest your Daniel's heart, and that they are his consolation when the world goes ill with him."

CHAPTER VIII.

GREENLANDS.

It was the drowsiest hour of a drowsy August afternoon when Eustace Thorburn made his way on foot from the Windsor terminus to the bailiff's house at Greenlands. He had put his luggage into a great lumbering fly, which was to crawl after him to his destination; and he went on foot through the rich pastoral country, with the grandest castle in the world looming upon him at every turn, in all its proud array of battlemented tower and terrace, keep and chapel. He went to begin his new life, and the country through which he went seemed to him more beautiful than his dreams of Paradise. Remember that he had newly come from the sandy flats of Flemish Flanders, and that the fairest landscape he had beheld of late was a row of lindens sheltering a sluggish

canal, and a herd of cattle browsing upon sunburnt table-lands. The shadow of a bitter grief was about and around him, and all the sunlight and beauty of the outer world seemed very dim and remote to him—something fair and beautiful in which he had no actual part, like a picture seen from afar off. But the influence of all this outward loveliness penetrated to his poor desolate heart, and warmed and melted it. His thoughts amidst these woods and pastures could never be so bitter, it seemed to him, as they had been in the stony quadrangle at Villebrumeuse. He thought of his mother as he walked slowly along the quiet roads and byways; but he no longer brooded gloomily upon her wrongs on earth as he had been wont to brood. He fancied her happy in heaven.

His way to Greenlands led him by the low meads athwart which the Thames winds like a silver ribbon, for the great neglected park of which Harold Jerningham was owner lay on the border of that delicious river. The way was very lonely, and somewhat intricate.

Eustace had occasion to stop at more than one cottage-door, and to ask his way of more than one rosy-faced rustic matron, who came from her wash-tub to answer his inquiries, sometimes accompanied by a toddling child, that peered curiously at the stranger from between the lattice-work of a garden-gate. The way was long and lonely; but at last, when the sun was low, the pedestrian came to a gate in a stout oak fence, and knew that he was on the threshold of Harold Jerningham's domain. The gate was unlocked, as the country people had told Eustace that it would be. The gate opened into the wildest region of the park; but at the end of a deep glade the traveller saw the great red-brick mansion, massive and stately, on the summit of a grassy slope.

"A noble domain," he thought, as he stopped to contemplate the scene before him. "Perhaps the heir to it is a young man with a father who is prouder of him than of lands or houses, or wealth or name. I can fancy the festivities and rejoicings when *he* came of age.

There were great tents on the lawn yonder, I dare say, and oxen roasted whole, and monster casks of ale set running."

Eustace Thorburn's imagination filled in all the details of that possible picture. He could see that imaginary heir walking slowly through a joyous crowd, with his arm linked in his father's. It was upon the image of that father the young man's mind dwelt with a strange melancholy yearning, half sorrow, half bitterness. How the proud face softened into tenderness, and the eyes grew dim with tears, as the father listened to the shouts and clamour of an admiring throng! This fatherless young man could so vividly imagine the love which must exist between a father and his son. Perhaps he imagined some more exalted feeling than ever did exist in human breasts. Perhaps he exaggerated the joys of such an affection; as the parched traveller in the desert may imagine unutterable deliciousness in a draught of the water that is spilt and wasted by heedless hands at the public fountain of a city.

As the traveller drew near to the red-brick mansion the vision of the possible festivity melted away, for he saw that no festival could have been celebrated in that place for many a year gone by. The palace of the Sleeping Beauty, buried deep in the innermost recesses of a forest, and forgotten by waking mankind, could have scarcely been more lonely or neglected of aspect than this old Berkshire mansion. The rabbits frisked across the young man's pathway as he went through the shadowy arcades, and the golden plumage of a pheasant glimmered here and there among the fern and underwood. Everywhere there was neglect and decay. The grass grew long and rank, and even in the gardens, where the handiwork of the gardener was visible, and where Eustace saw two feeble old men mowing the grass, it was evident that the work was only half done.

The path which Eustace had been directed to take led him past the gardens, which were only divided by an invisible fence from the park. He could have gone to the bailiff's

house by the high-road had he chosen; but this short-cut across the park saved him nearly a mile, and was a pleasanter way. To Eustace it was unspeakably delightful. The solemn quiet of the place imparted a new charm to its natural loveliness. A turn in the path brought him presently upon a wide expanse of smooth turf, shadowed here and there by great oaks and beeches, and across this wooded lawn he saw the river, gleaming bright and blue, athwart a fringe of trembling rushes. He paused for a few moments, transfixed by the tranquil loveliness of this English landscape, steeped in the rosy light of a summer evening.

"I suppose the owner of the place is a poor man, who cannot afford to occupy it," he thought; whereby it may be seen how a stranger, who judges by appearances, is likely to form a false conclusion.

Eustace Thorburn was ready to bestow his compassion upon the man who was lord of this enchanting domain, and yet unable to enjoy its loveliness.

The gray walls and red-tiled roof of the bailiff's house appeared between two masses of foliage as he drew near the border of the park. It was a house with many gables and great stacks of rickety-looking chimneys. Such a house as inspires contempt in the mind of a practical modern architect, by reason of the space that is frittered away on unnecessary passages, and little bits of rooms too small and dark for any civilized inhabitant, and ghastly cupboards in unsuspected places. It was a house in whose ample cellarage a gang of burglars might have lain perdu for a week, without the family being made aware of their presence. It was a house in which one could hardly retire to rest without expecting to see a pair of appalling Eyes staring at one through a crevice in the panelling, or two dreadful Boots emerging from beneath the drapery of the bed. If furniture of the commonest fashion, and fresh from the upholsterer, takes to itself awful voices after midnight, and creaks and groans with dismal significance in a mo-

dern London habitation, as it will—witness universal experience—what might not be expected from old oak bureaus and Elizabethan arm-chairs in this gabled dwelling? The out-buildings and disused chambers had that damp, earthy odour, which is known to every imaginative mind as the smell of ghosts; and that ubiquitous and nameless suicide, who seems to have hung himself or cut his throat at some remote date in every old house, had hung himself here, and made himself obnoxious to simple Berkshire maid-servants by those Cock-lane-like scrapings and tappings and rushings which the sternly commonplace mind is apt to attribute to rats.

This was the place to which Eustace Thorburn came in the rosy summer evening to begin his new life. The garden, which he entered by a low wooden gate, was the growth of a hundred and fifty years, and was as securely walled in by thick and high hedges of holly and yew as it could have been by the work of any mortal builder. The air was odorous with

the perfume of bright English flowers; and as the stranger drew near the house he was greeted with such a burst of honest woodland music from the throats of blackbirds and thrushes, larks and linnets, as he never remembered to have heard in all his life before.

They were caged birds that sang so blithely, and their cages hung in the roomy wooden porch with a thatched roof, over which there was spread a curtain of flowering clematis and rich crimson-veined honeysuckle. Out of this dusky porch a great Newfoundland dog sprang at the intruder, awakening distant echoes by his deep-toned thunder. But a woman's voice, very sweet and melodious, as the young man thought, called from the cottage, "Down, Hephæstus!—quiet, boy; quiet!" Eustace wondered what kind of woman this could be who lived in the student's cottage, and called her dog Hephæstus.

The Newfoundland crouched at the stranger's feet, obedient to the sound of that familiar voice; and then a man's footstep sounded in

the porch, and Theodore de Bergerac came out to meet his secretary. Eustace had been too much occupied by bitter and sorrowful thoughts within the last week to puzzle himself by speculative ideas about his new employer; but of course he had some vague notion—unconsciously conceived—of what M. de Bergerac would be like, and the real M. de Bergerac was the very reverse of that shadowy creature of his imagining. There had been in his mind some faint picture of a little wizen old man, with a weird face and a black-velvet skull-cap. Why a black-velvet skull-cap he could not have said; but possibly that kind of head-gear is in a manner allied with the idea of extreme erudition and much consumption of midnight oil. He had fancied a frail, wasted creature, with long, straggling white hair falling in unkempt locks upon the greasy collar of a dressing-gown; and lo! the man who came to greet him was tall and stalwart, with a bright, frank face, which had once been very handsome, and was handsome still, and iron-gray hair arranged

with scrupulous neatness. He walked rather lame, and carried a cane with a head of oxidized silver, exquisitely modelled—a gem in its way, like all the surroundings of its possessor, who had the taste of a Bernard or a Bohn.

This was Theodore de Bergerac, the man who at sixty years of age retained the freshness and gaiety of six-and-twenty. The lameness from which he suffered had afflicted him for the last thirty years, for it was the result of a musket-wound received at the siege of Antwerp. The student had been a soldier in those days, and had done good service under the brave leader he loved so well.

M. de Bergerac greeted Eustace with friendly courtesy. He spoke the English language perfectly; and it was only by a certain delicate precision of pronunciation—a somewhat measured accent—and by an occasional Gallic locution that strangers discovered his nationality.

"Welcome to Greenlands, Mr. Thorburn.

If you are fond of the country, I think you will love Berkshire. It has all the richness of southern France, and all the home-like comfort of Normandy. If we were a little nearer the sea, and could catch the breath of the ocean now and then from the summit of our hills, we should be in Paradise. But a man cannot expect to be *quite* in Paradise; and I suppose this is as near an approach to Eden as we can hope for upon earth. Have you dined? We live as people lived in French provincial towns when I was a boy; and our hours are as early as those of the country-people round about us. I suppose in London the world is beginning to dress for dinner. We dined half a dozen hours ago; but I can promise you an excellent supper. My little *ménagère* has made arrangements for a perfect banquet in your honour."

Eustace wondered whether the little *ménagère* and the lady who called to the dog were one and the same person. It was very foolish of him to wish that it might be so, and to imagine that the person must needs be young and beau-

tiful. But then poetical three-and-twenty is subject to such foolish wishes and imaginings.

Theodore de Bergerac and his secretary went into the house, where lights began to glimmer here and there in the dusk. The room into which the Frenchman led Eustace had that sweet rustic charm peculiar to country drawing-rooms; but the stranger fancied it had a certain harmonious beauty which he had never beheld in any other apartment. *Every* thing in it was beautiful. There were no false forms, no discordant tones lurking here and there to mar the harmony of the general effect. No pert young Cupid in Parian folded his mis-shapen wings, or uplifted his insolent pug nose before the outraged beholder—no hideous form of modern vase or flower-pot—no gaudy abomination of cheap Bohemian glass offended the eye; no impossible roses and lilies in Berlin-wool and bead-work offered themselves as a flowery couch for the visitor's repose. A subdued harmony of form and colour pervaded every object. The valuable books scattered lavishly in every

direction made no parade of their costliness. The rare old china needed examination before its beauty revealed itself. Everything was fresh and pure and delicate. There was a perfume of many flowers mingled with the subtle aroma of Russia-leather bindings, very pleasant to the stranger's nostrils. New though the place was to him, he had no sense of strangeness; he felt rather as if he had come home to some delicious and familiar resting-place for which he had long been yearning. Perhaps this feeling may have been a vague foreshadowing of his fate. Perhaps he had a faint semi-consciousness of the fact that perfect happiness was to come to him in that house.

The two men sat for some little time in the dimly-lighted room—lighted only by a pair of small wax candles in antique bronze candlesticks. They talked of many things, gliding imperceptibly from one subject to another without either jerks or pauses in the smooth current of talk. De Bergerac was a delight-

ful talker—playful and serious, gay and earnest by turns—now childishly emphatic about trifles, now touching the profoundest subjects with a graceful lightness. Eustace was charmed by his new employer, and began to think that his lines had fallen in pleasant places.

He may have been still more inclined to think so a few minutes later, when a trim little maid-servant announced that supper was ready, and M. de Bergerac led him into the dining-room.

The dining-room was only an old-fashioned oak-panelled chamber, like the drawing-room; but the hands which had beautified the one had imparted the same air of grace and refinement to the other. There were more pictures and books and china, more fresh flowers in vases of dark-blue Wedgwood: and, above all, there was that sweet home-like aspect, which has a deeper charm than is to be imparted by the choicest treasures of art or the fairest gifts of nature. A small round table was laid for

supper; and the bright colouring of a lobster, the tender green of a salad, the varied hues of some fruit piled high in a basket-shaped china dish, to say nothing of all the glitter and sparkle of rare old-fashioned glass and silver, or the amber and ruby of wines, made no uninviting picture under the mellow light of the lamp.

But there was a fairer picture to be seen in that chamber, which distracted the stranger's gaze from the hospitable preparations that had been made for him—the picture of a girl standing by a ponderous old easy-chair, with her white hands loosely folded on the cushion, and with the great black Newfoundland dog at her feet.

In the course of his eventless life Eustace Thorburn had not seen many beautiful women, so it is a small thing to say that the girl he saw to-night seemed to him the loveliest creature he had ever beheld. The dark beauties of Villebrumeuse, rich in the southern graces of their Spanish ancestors, had flashed their black

eyes upon the young Englishman sometimes, as he paced the quiet streets of their city, but had gone by unnoticed by him. It may have been that to-night his imagination was unusually exalted, his mind peculiarly prone to receive impressions, for it seemed to him as if he had passed out of the dull, beaten tracks of every-day life into an enchanted region, a kind of Arcadian fairy-land, of which this beauteous creature was a fitting queen.

She was an honest English beauty, and the brightness of her complexion had ripened under an English sun. Her dark-blue eyes seemed darker and bluer by reason of the rosy bloom of her cheeks and the crimson of her perfect mouth. The dusky gold of her hair was no fictitious charm derived from the costly washes of a court perfumer. She was no spurious Venetian beauty, with locks of tawny red; but a fair English girl, fresh and bright as a wood-land summer morning, pure as a flower with the dew upon its opening petals. Her white muslin dress was unrelieved by a trinket or a

ribbon; but what need had she of colour or jewels, whose eyes were more brilliant than the rarest sapphires, whose lips were more precious than Neapolitan coral, and in whose innocent young beauty there was a brightness surpassing the radiance of earthly gems?

"My daughter," said M. de Bergerac; "my daughter Helen—Mr. Thorburn." Whereupon this enchanting creature greeted the stranger with a bright smile and some indistinct murmur of welcome. They seated themselves at the little supper-table presently, and this divine Helen looked on admiringly while her father carved a fore-quarter of lamb. It was a long time since Eustace had taken a hasty snack of luncheon with his uncle, before starting for Windsor, yet he had little appetite for that innocent Berkshire lamb. His gaze wandered from the contents of his plate to Helen de Bergerac's fair young face; and if he had been sharing the Barmecide's shadowy feast, he could scarcely have been more unconscious of the flavour of the viands or the aroma of the wines.

"Help yourself to some of that Medoc, Mr. Thorburn," said his host; "and be sure you do justice to my daughter's salad. Helen is a salad-maker whom Brillat Savarin might have approved. The salad is the *chef-d'œuvre* of amateur art. No hired cook ever yet excelled in the composition of a salad. The task is too delicate for a hand that has been soiled by wages."

Eustace blushed. Three-and-twenty is so painfully sensitive. Was he not going to take wages in that house? He stole a look at his host's daughter, and wondered whether she felt a patrician contempt for her father's secretary. She had the blood of Spanish grandees in her veins, despite her English beauty. Heaven knows what haughty hidalgo might have infused his pride into those azure veins.

"She is aptly named," thought the young man; "Helen, the destroyer of ships and of men. Helen, the daughter of Jupiter and Nemesis—for I will never believe that poor Leda was any more than the nurse of that fatal

creature. Helen, the daughter of Nemesis—let me remember her parentage, and beware of her."

He discovered one fact in relation to Mademoiselle de Bergerac before the evening was over, though he could only watch her furtively now and then while her father was talking. He discovered that the damsel's heart was already engaged, and that he who came to lay siege to it would have need of patience and constancy. She was in love with her father. She watched him with tender, reverential eyes, and listened to him as to the voice of an oracle. Once, when his hand lay on the arm of his chair, she lifted it gently to her lips. And in all this there was no taint of affectation. No dryad of those Berkshire woods could have been more innocently natural than this descendant of Spanish hidalgos. No consciousness of her loveliness and fascination disturbed her sweet serenity as she talked to her father's secretary. She talked to him of pastoral pleasures and pursuits, and he divined from her talk that her

country life was very dear to her. Her father went to London very often, she told Eustace in the course of the evening, to buy books; and sometimes, but very rarely, took her with him.

"And then I see the SHOPS," she said; and by the tone of subdued ecstacy with which she pronounced this word, Eustace discovered for the first time that she was mortal. "I am afraid you will despise me very much for liking to see the shops. Papa does. He thinks it is the most foolish thing in the world to be fond of standing on a crowded pavement to look at dresses and bonnets that one is never likely to have."

"Or to want," interposed M. de Bergerac, looking proudly at the girl's animated face. "What could a little girl who makes butter do with fine silk dresses; and she is able to make butter for Windsor market, this young lady, as well as she is able to read Greek," added the father, fondly.

Eustace watched the two faces with a pensive

admiration. Here was that ideal father of whom he had dreamed so often; here was that pure and perfect love which he had fancied.

It was late before the little party separated, for M. de Bergerac had a student's attachment to the quiet of midnight, and an absent-minded man's unconsciousness of the flight of time. The clock of some village church-tower, hidden away somewhere beyond the beeches and oaks of Greenlands, struck twelve half an hour before the Frenchman conducted Eustace to the room that had been prepared for him. It was only a rustic chamber, with lattice casements set deep in a wall of old-fashioned solidity. The white draperies were faintly perfumed with that odour of rose-leaves and lavender which is as the very breath of the country. The lattice was open, and there was a vase of flowers on the broad window-ledge. Eustace wondered who had arranged those flowers. Not the trim little maid-servant surely. *She* would have squeezed the tender blossoms into a tightly-

packed circular bunch; while these were only a few loose half-budding roses nestling among cool green leaves.

The lattice was open, and the harvest-moon shone full and bright above the woods of which Harold Jerningham was master. Eustace stood at the open casement for some time after his host had left him. He stood there in the solemn stillness, looking out across those sombre masses of foliage towards the moonlit river—so difficult to believe in by this light as an earthly river, navigable by coal-barges, and instrumental in the turning of paper-mills. He looked out upon that landscape of semi-divine beauty, and thought with a half-contemptuous pity of the man who owned it. Theodore de Bergerac had talked of his friend during the varied course of that evening's conversation, and Eustace had discovered that the lord of Greenlands was a lonely and childless wanderer—a wanderer in first-class carriages, and a dweller in the most expensive caravanseries; but not the less homeless, and joyless, and purposeless—not the less

a standing example of the worthlessness of earthly prosperity.

Eustace Thorburn, the nameless and fatherless, pitied this childless man. It was scarcely strange if he let the underwood grow wild in his park, and foul weeds lie thick upon his lake. For whom should he be careful, for whom should he adorn and beautify, for whose sake should he plant young trees, or cut new avenues in the woodland? For what purpose should he heap up riches, who knew not what strange hand was destined to gather them?

But the secretary did not brood long on the sorrowful fate of that unknown Harold Jerningham. A fairer image came between him and the moonlit park, and it bore the likeness of Helen de Bergerac.

"I waste my thoughts upon a girl's lovely face, when I ought to be thinking of the work that lies before me," the young man said to himself, in angry scorn of his weakness. "Let me remember why I am here, and keep my brain clear of my employer's daughter, in order

that I may be able to help him honestly with his book."

He slept soundly and sweetly, lulled by the faint rustling of the foliage and the far-away murmur of the river. But his slumbers were not dreamless. He thought he saw the old red-brick mansion all ablaze with light. Long rows of windows shone on the darkness of the night, joyous music was wafted from the open lattices, and an indistinguishable some one in a crowd, that seemed all confusion and clamour, told him the heir of Greenlands had come of age.

He woke to see the sunshine in his room, and to hear Helen de Bergerac singing a waltz of Verdi's; while the song-birds in the porch strained their melodious throats to the uttermost, in the endeavour to drown their mistress's music.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THEY PARTED.

In the earlier years of her loneliness, Mrs. Jerningham's efforts in the way of little dinners were generally crowned with success. Women liked to dine at the toy-villa, because they knew the most eligible men were to be met there. Men were pleased to accept Mrs. Jerningham's invitations, sure that at her house they would encounter none but handsome or agreeable women. She displayed a delightful tact in the selection of her society. She would invite a lovely inanity to sit at her table, as a beautiful object for the contemplation of her guests ; but she would take care to balance her soulless divinity by some decent-looking woman with brains. If the Household-Brigade element threatened to preponderate, and there

was reason to dread that the whole talk at dinner would be about the wonderful things "fellows" present, and other fellows absent, who were the intimate friends of those fellows, had done in the way of deer-stalking in the Trossachs, or salmon-fishing in Norway, during the last autumn, Mrs. Jerningham took care to leaven it, and would despatch an invitation to some popular littérateur or fashionable actor, some clever amateur, well up in all the art-gossip, or a gentlemanly young explorer, lately returned from Africa with the last ideas about the source of the Nile, and delightful serio-comic anecdotes about encounters with crocodiles and Abyssinian damsels.

The mistress of River Lawn made her parties pleasant at any cost of trouble to herself. Even the dragon that guarded the enchanted garden, in the shape of an elderly aunt, was a pleasant dragon, who dressed well, and could talk cleverly on occasion. And then the dinners were not those shadowy repasts which are wont to be served in mansions where a lady

reigns unassisted by masculine counsel. Mrs. Colton, the elderly aunt, had entertained archbishops in her day, and knew how to compose a *menu*. The wines that sparkled into brightness under the light of beauty's eye at Mrs. Jerningham's table were supplied by Mr. Jerningham's own wine-merchant, who would not have dared to impose on the lady's possible innocence.

The house was very agreeable. That slight accident of Mr. Desmond's perpetual presence was only an additional advantage for people who wanted to beg favours from the fashionable editor—a good word for a new book, or a new play, or a new picture. It had become an established fact, that wherever Mrs. Jerningham appeared, Laurence Desmond was to appear also. His chosen friends gathered round her, like the knightly circle about a queen in the days when there was chivalry in the land, and a queen was a sacred creature. It was he who had brought that agreeable circle to River Lawn; how could a poor lonely woman have

beguiled the shining lights of the crack London clubs to illuminate her dinner-table? It was Desmond who kept a strict account of her feminine acquaintance, watchful lest the faintest shadow in the reputation of a friend should be reflected on her. The editor of the *Areopagus* knew everything and everybody. The inner mysteries of Belgravia and Tyburnia, which outsiders discussed in solemn whispers and with awful shrugs, were stale and hackneyed facts for him. He knew that Emily Jerningham paid a certain price for his friendship—pure and chivalrous though that friendship might be—and that she must continue to pay it to the end. She had been very friendless immediately after her separation from her husband; and when the tide of public opinion was at its flood, ready to turn either way, it was Laurence's subtle influence which had set it flowing pleasantly for her. But he knew that his friendship cost her a price, notwithstanding. There was the savour of patronage in the friendliness of the people he had won

to be her intimates. Spotless dowagers visited her and received her; but they were apt to affect a sort of pitying kindness when they spoke of her to other intimates. She was "that poor Mrs. Jerningham, who is separated from her husband, you know, my dear —Harold Jerningham, a dreadful person, I believe, though very nice in society. She lives with a widowed aunt, at the sweetest place, near Hampton, and gives charming parties; highly correct and proper in every way; and, you know, I think it a kind of duty to take notice of a woman in that position, when nothing can be said to her prejudice;" and so on, and so on, with inexhaustible variations on the perpetual theme. Laurence Desmond had heard the stereotyped talk a hundred times, and the recollection of it stung him to the very quick, when he thought of it in relation to the woman whom he could remember a girl of seventeen, dressed in white, and walking by his side in a little garden at Passy.

Yes, he had known Emily Jerningham before

she became the wife of her wealthy kinsman; he had known her in the days of her genteel poverty—the patient daughter of a peevish valetudinarian. He had been allied with this poorer branch of the Jerningham family by friendships and associations of many years' standing, and had never spent a week in Paris without paying more than one visit to the shabby, little furnished-house at Passy, in which Philip Jerningham dragged out the tiresome remnant of his useless existence with Emily for his companion and nurse, his secretary, butler, and steward. He had come at first prompted by a kindly feeling for the friend of his dead father; he came afterwards for his own pleasure; and those flying visits to Paris, which had been wont to occur two or three times in the year, began to repeat themselves at very short intervals.

He had fallen in love with Emily Jerningham, and he had sufficient reason for believing that his love was returned. Those evenings in the little flower-garden at Passy were the happiest

hours of his busy life. The paradise was very prim and dusty and arid, and all the roar and clamour of Paris thundered a hoarse chorus in the distance; but it was Eden, nevertheless; and when, a few years afterwards, he wasted an idle hour by going to look at the old place, he was surprised to discover what a shabby scene it was, now that the glamour had departed from it,

He was a proud man, and it was his misfortune to live in a world in which the splendour and luxuries of the million were accounted the necessities of existence. The women he met were women who would have been panic-stricken if they had found themselves on foot and alone in a crowded London street. They were women who, if suddenly reduced to the depths of poverty, would have thought the delf-plates and mugs of destitution a greater hardship than its bread and water. They were delicate creatures —"not too bright or good for human nature's daily food," but quite unable to cope with human nature's pecuniary embarrassments. They were

creatures who thought that a cheque-book went on for ever, like the Laureate's brook: and that so long as there were any of those nice oblong slips of paper left in the world, papas and husbands and brothers had nothing to do but to sign their names at the bottom of them.

Laurence Desmond intended to ask Miss Jerningham to be his wife, but he was determined not to marry until he was secure of something like fifteen hundred a year. He reckoned his future expenditure sometimes as he meditated by his bachelor hearth, with a cigar between his lips. Two hundred a year for a house somewhere within reasonable distance of the Park; a hundred for his wife's dress, fifty for his own; a miniature brougham would be rather a tight squeeze at a hundred and fifty; his own expenses, cigars, diplomatic dinners given at his club, cab-hire, books and newspapers, say two hundred more; and the remaining eight hundred for the vulgar necessities of everyday existence. Mr. Desmond mapped out his future

very pleasantly for himself and the woman he loved; but in those days he was yet very far from the possession of the indispensable fifteen hundred. So he held his peace in the little flower-garden at Passy, and was content to talk agreeable nonsense to Emily Jerningham, while the poor little fountain trickled and dripped in the sunshine, and the gaudy red geraniums in the plaster vases on the wall made patches of vivid colour against the hot blue sky, and that hoarse chorus of Paris sounded its perpetual accompaniment—the roar of wheels and the rattle of vehicles, the tinkling of bells, the jingling of spoons and glasses on the pavement outside the coffee-houses, and the voices of the excited million, all blended into one indistinguishable clamour, rising and falling like the waves of a distant sea.

Mr. Desmond waited, satisfied with his prospects, content to abide the ripening of his fortunes, and convinced that good feeling and policy alike were involved in patience. Unhappily, the man who plans his own life is like a

chess-player in London matched against a chess-player in Paris, and with *no* telegraphic communications of his adversary's moves. His theory of the game is perfect. His plan of action is decided upon with the cool deliberation of an accomplished strategist. He sees his way to the very end of the encounter: his castle there, his bishop here, his queen in the centre of the board, and—lo, his enemy is checkmated! But that hidden player in Paris adopts unimaginable tactics; and suddenly, after one never-to-be-expected move, the player in London finds himself ignominiously beaten.

While Laurence Desmond was dreaming lazily of the future, lingering over his midnight cigar in Temple chambers—nearer the chimney pots than the handsome rooms he afterwards occupied—Philip Jerningham took it into his head to die suddenly, and Emily came to London with a letter to her cousin ever-so-many-times-removed, the irresistible Harold. By one of those insignificant accidents which make the links in the great chain of destiny, it happened that

the announcement of Philip Jerningham's death escaped the eye of Emily's undeclared admirer. It was not to be expected that a bereaved daughter, who was left very desolate and helpless, could write ceremonious notes to all her late father's masculine acquaintance; and Emily had the Jerningham pride, and, for some unknown reason, was peculiarly inclined to be resentful of small offences where Laurence Desmond was concerned. So the editor went on smoking his midnight cigars, and pushing on steadily towards the achievement of the indispensable income; deferring week after week and month after month the Parisian holiday which he was always promising himself.

The time drifted by him with that imperceptible progress which is so peculiar to time when a man is always wrestling with the arrears of his labour, and trying to get seventy minutes out of an hour. Time puts on a special pair of wings for the slave who fills a waste-paper basket and uses half-a-crown's worth of postage-stamps every day of his life except Sunday, and

who sits under a popular preacher on that day, weighed down by the consciousness of a hundred unanswered letters, and the knowledge that a hundred offended correspondents are swelling with indignation because of his neglect.

Mr. Desmond was roughly awakened from his pleasant day-dreams one morning on reading the announcement of Harold Jerningham's marriage. The blow was a severe one, and for some days the writer's arguments were rather weak and inconsequential, and the editor's eye unusually careless of flaws and blemishes in the work of his contributors. Only now that Emily was lost to him did he know how very dear she had been; but even more bitter to Laurence Desmond than the thought of his loss was the idea of his folly.

"I fancy myself a man of the world," he said to himself, "and yet I am the dupe of masculine fatuity which would be contemptible in a stripling newly escaped from the university. I thought she loved me; I thought her love was as entirely my own as if I had re-

ceived the assurance of it in the plainest words that were ever spoken."

The idea that he had been duped by his own vanity stung him to the quick. He studiously avoided the places in which he was likely to encounter Emily Jerningham, and it was not until a year after her marriage that he met her. He came upon her suddenly one bright autumn day in an obscure foreign picture-gallery. For years after that day he was able to recall the scene of their unexpected meeting—the quaint old chamber in the courtyard of an hospital, the grim pre-Raphaelite pictures of unpleasant martyrdoms, the dusty motes dancing in the sunlight, and the listless grace of a woman who stood with her back towards him, leaning on the top rail of a chair, with an open catalogue held loosely in her hand. There was no one but this woman in the gallery. The door banged behind Mr. Desmond as he went in, and startled by the noise, she turned and looked at him.

This is how he met Emily Jerningham. The

white change in her face told him that he had not been the dupe of a delusion when he fancied himself beloved. He felt that he must be something more than a common acquaintance to the woman who looked at him with that pale, terror-stricken face. For a moment he feared that Mrs. Jerningham would faint; but the fear was groundless. She belonged to a class in which the women have some touch of the Roman's grandeur mingled with the sensuous softness of the Greek. The colour came back to her cheeks and lips in a few moments, and she held out her hand to her dead father's friend.

"How do you do, Mr. Desmond?" she said. "I did not know that you were in Germany."

"No. I am taking a brief holiday. Is Mr. Jerningham with you?"

"Yes; he had letters to write this morning, and sent me to explore this curious old hospital by myself. Do you stay long here?"

"I go on to Vienna this evening."

The beautiful face grew pale again. Mrs. Jerningham looked at her catalogue.

"I think I have seen all the pictures," she said. "My guide has gone to look for the key of some mysterious chamber; I must go in search of him. Good-morning, Mr. Desmond. Oh, here is my husband!"

Mr. Jerningham sauntered into the gallery.

"I couldn't stand any more letter-writing, so I came to see your pictures, Emily," he said. "Ah, Desmond, how do you do? What brings you to this queer old place, so completely out of the beaten track—almost beyond the ken of *Murray?* You know my wife? Ah, I remember; your father and her father were great cronies. How is it you never told me you knew Desmond, Emily?"

Mrs. Jerningham's reply was only a vague murmur; but her husband was not one of those men who hang upon the utterances or watch the looks of their wives. He allowed the woman he had chosen ample liberty, only requiring that her toilette should be perfect,

her voice harmonious, her movements graceful, and her reputation spotless. For it is an understood thing, that whatever character Cæsar himself may bear, there must be no possibility of suspicion with regard to Cæsar's wife.

Harold Jerningham and Laurence Desmond had met very often before to-day. It happened that the Jerninghams were also on their way to Vienna, and had made their arrangements for travelling by the same train as that chosen by Laurence. They met at the station, and travelled together, Mr. Jerningham being very well pleased to find the tedium of the journey beguiled by masculine companionship. Mrs. Jerningham sat in a corner of the carriage, very silent and impenetrable, but beautiful to look upon in the fitful glare of the railway lamp, or in occasional glimpses of moonlight.

That night-journey was the beginning of a closer acquaintanceship between Harold Jerningham and Laurence Desmond. During the ensuing London season the younger man was a frequent visitor at the house of the elder.

The Jerninghams met Mr. Desmond at parties. They met him in the following winter at a country house; sat round the same fire at Christmas time, and shuddered at the same ghost-stories; danced in the same condescending quadrille at a ball of servants and tenantry, and plucked costly trinkets from the same Christmas-tree—Harold always more or less distinguished by the tone of a being who had endured a previous existence in every star in the planetary system, and was wearily "doing" his last world before final extinction.

Mrs. Jerningham had learned by this time to meet her old friend without sudden pallor or sudden blushes. If she met him very often, she met him by favour of that chain of accidents which links together the lives of some men and women. She happened to be buying hyacinths in the Pantheon during the hour which the hard-working editor snatched from the cares of journalism in the sweet cause of friendship, bringing to bear all the forces of his mighty intellect on the selection of a squirrel,

intended for a birthday-gift to a fellow-worker's little girl. If the purchase of the hyacinths and the squirrel occupied a longer time than is usually devoted to such small transactions, it must be remembered that there is great room for the exercise of taste and discretion in the choice of flowers which are to fill a jardinière of the real old *bleu de roi* Sèvres, and an animal which is to twirl perpetually for the delight of one's friend. Nor was there anything extraordinary in the fact that Mr. Jerningham and his wife encountered Laurence Desmond ever and anon at the Opera, at the Botanical and Zoological Gardens, and at other places of public resort. The circle in which decent people revolve is such a narrow one that there must needs be these accidental encounters at every turn in the crowded ring.

"I fancy we meet Mr. Desmond a little more frequently than other people," Harold Jerningham said one day to his wife; and this was the only occasion on which he made any special mention of the editor's name.

It was about a week after Mr. Jerningham made this remark, that Emily found a letter awaiting her on the table of her morning-room. The letter was addressed in her husband's hand, sealed with her husband's arms and cipher. It was his habit to write her little notes informing her of his movements when the pressing business of their useless existence separated them for a day or so; but he did not usually seal his letters. This letter was sealed: and there must have been something in the appearance of the document which startled Mrs. Jerningham, for she grew very pale, and her hand trembled as it tore open the envelope.

The length of the letter was not calculated to alarm a woman who expected a marital lecture.

"My dear Emily,—The tulip-wood cabinet in which I keep coins is exactly the same as that which you use for your letters. The keys are duplicates. I opened yours instead of my

own this morning, in a fit of absence of mind, and saw some letters. I did not read them. The fact of their existence, their number, and the address they bear—which is not to any house of mine, is sufficiently suggestive. Be good enough to remain at home to-morrow. Mr. Halfont will call upon you in the course of the morning.—Truly yours,

"H. J."

This was all. Mr. Halfont was the family lawyer, a person whose name was generally heard in connection with leases. Mrs. Jerningham looked at the two cabinets, one on each side of the fireplace. Yes, they were exactly alike. She had known that always, and might have guessed that the locks and keys were the same. But she had never thought on the subject; the apartment was so entirely her own sanctum; and Harold Jerningham possessed so many cabinets filled with coins and medallions, cameos and intaglios, which he never looked at, and which, after the

feverish delight of bidding for them at Christie's, were supremely indifferent to him. How, then, should she have foreseen the possibility of the accident that had happened?

Was it altogether an accident?

Emily took a key from a little casket on the table, and went to one of the cabinets—her own. She opened it, and seated herself in the chair before it—the chair in which Harold Jerningham had sat an hour ago, no doubt. The piece of furniture was half-cabinet, half-secrétaire; and it was here that Mrs. Jerningham was wont to fill in the blanks in those lithographed protestations of rapture or expressions of regret wherewith she accepted or declined the invitations of her acquaintance. It was here she wrote her letters, and it was here she kept the MSS. of those correspondents whose letters were worthy of preservation. They were in a row of pigeon-holes; and amongst those in the pigeon-hole marked D there was a packet tied with ribbon. That tendency to render a bundle of dangerous

letters conspicuous by a circle of bright-hued ribbon is one of womanhood's fatal weaknesses.

Mrs. Jerningham took out the packet and contemplated it thoughtfully.

"I wish he had read the letters," she said to herself; "it would have been much better for both of us if he had read them."

She looked at the address upon the topmost envelope:

"E. J.,
"*Post Office*,
"*Vigo Street*."

"It was very wrong to have them directed to a post-office," she thought to herself.

She packed the letters in a sheet of paper, and directed the packet to her husband, with a brief note, the composition of which cost her much trouble. She shed some few tears while she was writing this note; but she took care that they should not fall on the paper. There was a certain firmness and decision in her manner which was scarcely compatible with the feelings of an utterly guilty woman.

Mrs. Jerningham had a long interview with her husband's lawyer on the following day, an interview which had in it none of the unpleasant elements of a "scene." After this the house in Park Lane was abandoned by both master and mistress. Mr. Jerningham was abroad; Mrs. Jerningham at one of the country houses. It was not till the following season that the world in which the Jerninghams lived became aware that the Jerninghams had parted. So small an amount of union is necessary to constitute marriage in this upper world that the fact of the separation only became patent on the establishment of the toy-villa at Hampton.

CHAPTER X.

THERE IS ALWAYS THE SKELETON.

In this bright summer-time the gardens of the toy-villa were a paradise of roses. The lawns were dotted by great clumps and mounds of blossom; red and white damask and maiden's-blush jostling one another in rich profusion. Tall standard-roses climbed skyward on iron rods, rustic baskets brimmed over with the precious flowers; and there were so many creeping tendrils entwining thin iron-work arches and airy colonnades, that the visitor who approached Mrs. Jerningham made his way to her presence beneath a gentle shower of perfumed petals.

Under the falling rose-petals went the editor of the *Areopagus* one sultry morning. He had come from London by rail, and the dust of the journey was white upon his dark-blue coat. He

looked a little wan and jaded in the searching July sunshine, a little the worse for late hours and perennial anxieties; and he sighed ever so faintly as a warm gust of summer wind flung a spray of blossom against his face.

The river lay before him, deeply blue under the cloudless sky; and on his left, half hidden amongst guelder-roses and the dark foliage of myrtle and magnolia, there was the villa, a fantastical edifice, in which the Tudor, the Moorish, the Italian, and the mediæval Norman forms of architecture had struggled for preëminence; a house which seemed all windows, and in which every window was of a different type—the house of all others to be dear to the heart of a woman.

The garden of roses, the river, and the fantastical villa made altogether a very charming picture—a picture which Mr. Desmond contemplated with a half-regretful sigh.

"Surely one ought to find happiness in such a place!" he said to himself.

He had entered by a little gate that was

rarely locked; and he went across the lawn towards an open drawing-room window, with the air of a man who has no need of ceremonial announcement. Mrs. Jerningham came out of the window as he approached.

"Good morning, Mr. Desmond," she said, as they shook hands. "Have you come by rail—on such a warm day too? That is very good of you. I think a noonday ride in a railway carriage at this time of year is a species of martyrdom. One thinks of the iron coffin and the Piombi at Venice, and that kind of thing."

Mr. Desmond looked at the speaker, doubtfully. This was evidently not exactly the reception he was accustomed to receive from Mrs. Jerningham.

"If you are going to talk to me like a stage-widow, Emily, I had better go back to town," said he, gravely.

"How should I talk to you? I see you so seldom now, that I lose the habit of adapting my conversation to your taste. I think stage-widows are very charming people. At any rate,

they always find *something* to say, and that is an important consideration."

"I have been very much occupied lately."

"It seems to me that you are always very much occupied. I saw your name, by the bye, amongst the names of the people at the breakfast at Pembury."

"I was obliged to go to Pembury."

"And you were at Marble Hill on Tuesday."

"I had particular business with Lord Chorlton."

"And you chose the occasion of an archery fête for your business."

"I was glad to seize any opportunity. Chorlton is not easily to be got at."

"Oh, please don't speak of him as if he were a jockey," exclaimed the lady, with an air of irrepressible irritation.

"What has happened to annoy you this morning, Mrs. Jerningham?"

"Nothing—this morning."

"But something *has* annoyed you."

"Yes, I am tired of my life; that is all that

ails me, Mr. Desmond. I am tired of my life. Of course you will tell me that it is very wicked to be tired of one's life, and that there are people starving in those dreadful London alleys who would be very glad to come and live here, and stare at the river, and wonder whether the swans are tired of *their* lives, as I do hour after hour in all the long, long days of the long, long summer. But, you see, that doesn't make my case any better. I am very sorry for the poor people; and if it were not so impossible to imagine them in conjunction with amber-silk furniture, I am sure they would be very welcome to come here. I have made a feeble attempt to do some good in my neighbourhood; but I find that other people can do that kind of thing much better than I, and that my money is all that is really necessary. My life passes, and the time, which is so long as it crawls by, leaves no mark behind it. And then, when I look forward to the future, I see—a blank."

Her tone and manner had become more se-

rious as she went on. They had walked away from the house, and by this time were in a sheltered pathway that bordered the river.

"Yet the future may not be altogether blank, Emily," answered Laurence. "There may come a time when——"

"Yes; I know what you mean. There may come a time when I shall be as free as you were before you met me in the hospital at Bundersbad. I sometimes fancy that, if you or I ever see that day, it will come too late. There are sacrifices which cost too much, and the sacrifice which you have made for me is one of them."

"The greater sacrifice has been on your side," said the editor, very gravely.

"I do not know that, Laurence. I sometimes think that your bondage must be harder to bear than mine. For nine years you have patiently endured all the complaints and caprices of a discontented woman, when you might have had a bright home, and a happy wife to bid you welcome in it, but for me."

"The bright home and the happy wife may be mine yet, Emily."

"If they ever are yours, they will come to you too late. A home is one of the blessings which must not be waited for. A man loses the habit of home-life. I have seen something of this, you know, in my father's life. He did not marry till he was between forty and fifty; and when he married, he had lost the capability of being happy at home. It will be the same with you, Laurence, if you do not marry soon. The hard, worldly way of thinking, and the self-contained feelings of a bachelor, are growing stronger with you day by day, and even a wife whom you loved would hardly be able to make home agreeable to you. And this is all my fault, Laurence—my fault!"

"This is not fair, Emily," said Mr. Desmond, almost sternly. "When I lament the restraints of my position, it will be time for you to reproach yourself on my account, and not till then. Pray let us be reasonable. When you and Harold Jerningham parted for ever, it

was agreed between us that we should be friends, and friends only, so long as your husband's life should last. He is so many years our senior, that it is not possible for us to ignore the fact that in all likelihood the day will come when you and I can be united by a sweeter tie than that of friendship. If there be a sin involved in looking forward to that day hopefully, but not impatiently—I have been guilty of that sin; but I have been guilty of no other wrong against the man who bears your name. God knows, and you know, that I have been true to our compact. I have been your friend, and nothing but your friend. No shadow of a lover's caprice, no touch of a lover's jealousy, has ever clouded our friendship. It has been the one bright oasis in the desert of an anxious and laborious life. And if you think that the treasure is unvalued by me because I do not spend three days a week in the delicious idleness of this garden, or because I do not waste all my evenings in your drawing-room, you are only a new example of the ignorance

which obtains among your class with regard to the necessities of a working life."

Mrs. Jerningham's face brightened considerably while Mr. Desmond was speaking. It was a fine patrician face, with the bloom of youth still upon it, in spite of the lady's nine-and-twenty years' residence in this planet. She turned to Mr. Desmond with a smile, and held out her hand.

"Shake hands, Laurence, and forgive me," she said, gently. It was part of their covenant that they should be at liberty to address each other by their Christian names, but that none of the epithets sacred to the use of lovers should ever obtain currency between them.

"And you are really not tired of your position?" said Mrs. Jerningham, with a pleading smile.

"Have I ever hinted a complaint?"

"No, Laurence. But then you are not the kind of person to complain. You would be like that dreadful Spartan boy one never hears the last of: you would hide the animal—why

do some people call it a wolf, and others a fox, by the bye?—under your waistcoat, and go about the world smiling the smile of martyrdom. I am so afraid of doing you a great wrong. Poets and novelists are always preaching about a woman's unselfishness; but I really think that is one of the formulas of their art. Have I not shown myself very selfish, Laurence? I allowed my foolish eyes to be dazzled by that Dead-Sea fruit which the world calls a splendid marriage; and having bitten the apple and found the bitterness of its core, I share the ashes with you."

"I am very well content with the ashes."

"Some day you will be tired of your bondage."

"When that day comes, I will ask you for my freedom."

"Will you promise me that, Laurence?"

"With all my heart."

"In that case I am quite happy," answered the lady, eagerly. "And you really do not wish to claim your freedom immediately, Laurence?"

"Neither immediately nor in the remote

future. If Mr. Jerningham should live to be a hundred years of age, at which period I should be eighty, the bachelor habits which you reprobate may perhaps have taken complete possession of me; but as Mr. Jerningham is not the kind of man whose life would be taken on the most reasonable terms by the Norwich Union or the European, I can afford to place my faith in time."

"Laurence, there is something so horrible in this calculation."

"I do not calculate; I wait. And now let us talk of something else. You have not asked me any of your usual questions about the toilettes at Marble Hill."

"I don't want to know anything about them," replied Mrs. Jerningham, frigidly.

Mr. Desmond winced. A man's intellect, however acute, is rarely equal to the exigences of feminine society. The châtelaine of Marble Hill happened to be one of those matrons who cannot bring themselves to think well of any woman living apart from her husband. Emily

Jerningham's name had been wont to figure in the lady's visiting-list, and had vanished therefrom immediately after the establishment of the villa at Hampton.

"The fête was rather a dull affair," said Mr. Desmond, presently, with that clumsy hypocrisy which is the male creature's best substitute for tact.

"What did Lady Laura Paunceford wear?" asked Mrs. Jerningham, with feminine inconsistency.

"Oh, some wonderful costume of blue, very cloudy and voluminous, like the dress of a goddess in one of Sir Godfrey Kneller's ceilings. I believe she wore something that was intended for a bonnet—a blue gauze butterfly, skewered to her head by silver arrows."

"Did she look well?"

"By no means; she is not a daylight beauty."

"And Miss Fitzormond?"

"Miss Fitzormond's dress was absolutely dowdy. A new style, Mrs. Castlemaine told

me; the last rage in Paris; and supposed to have been developed from the fair Eugénie's inner consciousness. It is rather hard upon the Empress that she should be accredited with every atrocity invented by the enterprising milliners of the Fauburg St. Honoré."

"What was the dress?" Mrs. Jerningham demanded, languidly.

"Something mauve, festooned with steel chains and spikes; Miss Fitzormond looked like a mauve prisoner escaped from Newgate."

"Were there many pretty women at the fête? No; you needn't answer me. Of course you will declare that you found yourself amidst an assemblage of Gorgons. Men are so fearful of wounding a woman's vanity, that they rarely remember she may by some possibility possess a grain or two of common-sense. Let us go to the dining-room. It is time for luncheon, and I dare say my aunt has been sending skirmishers out to look for me."

"There is a parcel of books and music at the station. Will you send for it?"

"With delight. How good of you to bring me more new books!"

"Are you prepared to stand a competitive examination in the last I brought you?"

"Better than you in the works of the authors you have lately annihilated, Mr. Editor and Reviewer."

On this they went back to the house, where they were received by the most amiable of dragons, dressed in dove-coloured silk, and a pale-blue morning-cap, which made middle age a state for youth to envy. The luncheon, in common with all the surroundings of Harold Jerningham's wife, was perfection. The spirit of the elegant Harold himself pervaded this house, across the threshold whereof his foot had never passed. It was Mr. Jerningham's pet architect who had restored the miniature mansion, and Mr. Jerningham's favourite upholsterer who had decorated and furnished the interior. When Mrs. Jerningham wanted a new servant, it was Mr. Jerningham's steward who supplied the vacancy in her well-organized

establishment. Life had been made very easy for her since her separation from her husband —a little too easy, perhaps; for a woman who has none of the ordinary cares of her sex is apt to create troubles of her own.

People who wondered and speculated about the separation were often surprised to hear Mr. Jerningham say: "I have bought that picture for my wife;" or, "I am looking for a safe pony-phaeton for my wife;" or, "I want to find a good binder for some books of my wife's." He took pains to let the world know that he was on excellent terms with the lady in the toy-villa; and this certificate of character had served Emily Jerningham in good stead. Her husband's diplomacy might have kept even the sacred portals of such houses as Marble Hill open to her, if Mr. Desmond had not been quite so frequent a visitor at her house. But the world is slow to believe in a Platonic attachment, and it is not to be denied that the friendship of Laurence Desmond had cost Mrs. Jerningham a certain price.

Nor was that friendship altogether pleasant to her. The conversation of this morning was only a variation upon a very familiar theme. Again and again Mr. Desmond had been called upon to listen to the same complaints, and to dispel the same doubts. There were times when he was very conscious of the pain and weariness involved in this state of things. There were times when a still, small voice within him echoed Emily Jerningham's wish that they had never met in the hospital at Bundersbad, never renewed the friendship so near akin to love, never interchanged those foolish, sentimental letters which had caused the separation of Harold and his wife. It seemed such a weak, frivolous, despicable piece of wrong-doing, now that it was done, and had exercised a lifelong influence upon the destinies of three people.

If Mrs. Jerningham was doubtful and suspicious of Mr. Desmond, he, on his part, was not entirely at his ease about her. Was she happy? He asked himself that question very

often, and the answer was not always pleasant to him.

"No real happiness ever came of wrong-doing," he said to himself; "we did wrong, and we are paying the price of our folly."

It was only to himself that Mr. Desmond ever said so much as this. To Emily Jerningham he was always the same—an attentive and respectful friend—patient, chivalrous, and self-sacrificing as a social Bayard; but not to be beguiled from the duties of his professional position, even by the claims of friendship.

CHAPTER XI.

"J'AIME : IL FAUT QUE J'ESPERE."

EUSTACE THORBURN found existence altogether a new kind of thing at the old house amongst the Berkshire woods. His sorrow for the death of his mother was no transient shadow, to be dispelled by the first bright glimpse of sunlight that fell across his pathway. It was a deep and enduring sorrow ; but it was a grief which held a fixed place in his mind, apart from the common joys and vexations of life. All through those bright summer days the young man showed himself a cheerful companion, an enthusiastic student, a willing and devoted worker ; and it was only by his mourning dress that those amongst whom he lived were reminded of his recent loss. But every night, in the stillness of his own room, the familiar agony came back to his breast ; memory and imagination travelled

again upon the beaten track; and he thought of his mother's joyless womanhood and lonely death with a pain as bitter as that which he had felt when he stood beside her newly made grave.

Such things as these are not to be forgotten. Are they not the "pathetic minor" which underlies all the harmonies of earth, heard more or less distinctly, but silent never?

The one clue which his mother's letter afforded had been sedulously followed up by Eustace. The stranger calling himself Hardwick was the writer of a book first published in the year '43; and a book of some repute, as the young man gathered from the letters of his unknown father. Eustace had Mrs. Willows' authority for the fact that the book was some kind of novel or romance; and acting upon this information, he devoted himself for three consecutive days to an examination of the critical magazines and periodicals of that year in the reading-room of the British Museum.

The result of his labours was not particularly

satisfactory. So many romances published within the year were spoken of as the best novels of the season, or as works bearing the seal of genius, or as the promise of greater things from the matured mind of the writer, that it needed much sifting of all this chaff before the amount of genuine wheat contained therein could be fairly estimated. But at last, after a careful study of the *Literary Gazette* and *Athenæum*, the quarterlies and monthies, Eustace Thorburn selected, from a long list of brilliant successes and best novels of the season, three books, each of which seemed to bear upon it the stamp of something greater than amiable mediocrity.

These are the titles of the three books which Eustace Thorburn selected, after having read them carefully and thoughtfully :

1. *Dion :* a Confession.

2. *Latimer's Sister :* a Story. By Marcus Anderton.

3. *The Spectre of Walden :* a Romance. By G. G. G.

Of these three, *Dion* was the most singular; *Latimer's Sister* the most tender; *The Spectre* the most poetical. Any one of these books might have exercised a powerful effect upon the mind of a sentimental woman. That they were all three written by men, and by young men, Eustace entertained no doubt. He did not, indeed, trust entirely to his own judgment; for he enlisted the services of his Uncle Dan, and induced that practised reviewer to read the three books.

"All masculine work!" cried Mr. Mayfield. "No woman could have written *Latimer's Sister* without telling us when the young lady who figures as the heroine wore blue silk, or how lovely she looked in pink tarlatane. *The Spectre* is a translation from the German. No Englishman would have been as simple and true to nature in his peasant-life; and I recognize untranslatable German compounds in my friend's phraseology. The book which indicates power, and even genius, is *Dion*. I have a sort of hazy recollection of hearing that book talked

about when I was a young man, and of hearing that it was written by some sprig of quality. In my opinion, Eustace, that story of *Dion* is the kind of book to fascinate a girl."

"It is so morbid, so gloomy."

"Gloom is the very thing a girl loves, especially when it is the gloom of the storm-cloud —passion, and anguish, and so on. Depend upon it, my dear lad, *Dion* is the book that man wrote—the book your mother was reading in the unlucky hour in which he first saw her face."

"I am inclined to believe that you are right, Uncle Dan," Eustace answered, thoughtfully. "It is evidently the work of a scholar."

"Yes, but of a very young scholar. The learning is there, but in a crude, half-digested state. The pages bristle with fragments of old-world wisdom. The wisdom does not underlie the whole, it is not interwoven with the very fabric of the book, as in the work of a mature mind. There is passion and poetry,—a hazy kind of poetry, but with a certain fascination and grace of its own,—the poetry of a man

who has never written for bread, or been troubled by uncertainties about his dinner. That parting with the girl Una is very pretty; and the dream in the ruined manor-house has a weird power. One almost feels the cold winds blowing through the windows that will not shut; one almost sees the midnight shadows of ash and poplar lying black on the moss-grown flags of the quadrangle, and all the nakedness and desolation of the place. Yes, Eustace, there is the glamour of youth and poetry upon *Dion;* I should not wonder if the man who wrote that book were the man who won your mother's heart."

Daniel Mayfield spoke with an air of conviction that had considerable influence upon his nephew. He went back to the reviews of *Dion*, in the hope of finding some clue to the writer in the opinions and speculations of the reviewers.

In this he was disappointed. The reviewers told him no more than his Uncle Dan had told him. They judged the writer as Mr. Mayfield had judged him, from the evidence of the book; they had evidently no knowledge outside the

book. The mystery of anonymous publication had been religiously preserved, and as the book had created some sensation at the time of its appearance, there had been considerable speculation as to the individuality of the writer.

The result of all this speculation was limited to the following deductions:

1st. The writer of the book was a young man who had gone through the usual curriculum of a university education.

2nd. The style and manner of thinking were eminently Oxonian.

3rd. The writer was well acquainted with Continental life.

4th. He was as familiar with German literature as with the classics.

5th. His proclivities were aristocratic; his contempt for the masses supreme and undisguised.

6th. His philosophy was Epicurean; his gods the graceful divinities of Greece; his nature sensuous, selfish, but not altogether base. He was an ardent worshipper of the

beautiful. He thirsted for woman's love,—the pure, the true; but it was the purity and truth of earth's primæval freedom for which he languished, rather than the divine sentiment allowed by Christian rule.

Upon these points the reviewers were strong, and they had sufficient justification for their opinion. The book was pervaded by the personality of the writer. It was indeed a confession, an autobiographical record, in which the events and circumstances of actual life were doubtless altered and disguised, but a record which laid bare the heart and mind of the man.

Eustace read the book at the British Museum, and persuaded his uncle to read it at the same place. He tried to obtain a copy of the story; but *Dion* had long been out of print. The booksellers had only the faintest recollection of a book of that name, and of the fact that it had created some slight stir during the brief season of its popularity.

"I'll get you a copy of the book, sooner or

later, if your heart is set upon it, lad," said Daniel Mayfield. "You know what a habitual book-stall lounger I am, and how many times I have had my pocket picked while I have been dipping into one of the Neo-Platonists, or an Amsterdam edition of Hysminias and Hysmine, before a second-hand bookseller's emporium. *Dion* is just the sort of book to figure in a bookseller's box of odd volumes—'All these at twopence,'—and, depend upon it, I shall meet with the gentleman some day. I know a man who is very clever at picking up any out-of-the-way book I happen to want; and if you wish it, I'll set him to work."

"I shall be very glad if you do; I would willingly give a guinea for that book."

"I'll get it you for half the money; but I wish to heaven you would abandon all speculations about this man, who, after all, may not be the author of *Dion*."

"That I shall never do while my brain has power to speculate; so let us say no more about that, Uncle Dan."

It was rather late in the autumn when Eustace Thorburn made his researches at the British Museum. He obtained a few days' holiday from his employer, and shared his Uncle Daniel's lodgings in Great Ormond Street,—big rooms that had once been very grand and noble, and which, even now, had a pleasant airy aspect, and some remains of old-world splendour.

The "few days" stretched themselves into a week before the young man had completed his studies, but at the end of the week he bade his kinsman good-bye, and went back to Berkshire, in no wise sorry to return to the park and forest, the winding river and odorous flower-garden of his new home.

In no wise sorry? Could there be gladness more complete than that which filled his breast as he returned to the house he had learned to think of as a home?

"M. de Bergerac's book will be finished by and by, and he will have no further need of my services," thought the returning traveller, as

the sober goddess of common-sense projected her dark shadow athwart the sunlit realms of fancy. "I shall have to bid farewell to these new friends, and begin the world once more among strangers. I suppose that will be the story of my life. I may find friends; I may attach myself to a stranger's house, until I almost fancy I have kindred and a home, like the rest of mankind; and then, just when I am happiest, my foolish dream will end all at once, and I shall have to begin life again. Oh, let me be patient when the trial comes! My life can never be so sad and dreary as *hers* was."

Further reflection developed consoling ideas that brought back a happy smile to the traveller's lips.

"The *History of Superstition* will not be finished for many a long year at its present rate of progress," he said to himself. "I could wish for nothing better than to live for ever at the bailiff's cottage, working for the kindest of employers."

He could not, indeed, imagine any state of

happiness more perfect than that which he enjoyed in Theodore de Bergerac's quiet home, after all due reservation had been made for that secret sorrow which was not altogether to be put away from his mind, even when his surroundings were brightest.

Life at Greenlands was very quiet. The scholar and his daughter were a modern Prospero and Miranda, with trim maid-servants to wait upon them instead of Caliban; and the new Miranda's life was not much less lonely than that of her prototype on the enchanted isle. Mademoiselle de Bergerac had very few friends and no acquaintance. She had never been to school, and she had scarcely heard the names of those pleasures and excitements which are the necessities of fashionable damsels. To take tea with the curate's daughters, under the walnut-trees in the prettiest corner of the lawn, was a delightful festivity; to picnic at Burnham Beeches with her father and two or three chosen friends was a matter of almost bewildering excitement; to creep along by the

willowy margin of the river in her own light skiff, while her father sat in the stern reciting some of Victor Hugo's noblest verses for her edification, was a quiet rapture above and beyond all those unknown pleasures of whose existence she was vaguely conscious.

Never was maiden better pleased with her own life and her own surroundings than Helen de Bergerac. She had the Gallic vivacity of disposition, the sanguine, romantic temperament of the Celt. She adored her father, and adored the fair English country, and the river, and her dog, and Greenlands; and it was only sometimes, in a tender reverie, that she pictured to herself sunnier lands,—the vineyards of Provence, the towers and steeples of Norman cities, the broad blue waters of the Seine, broken by islets of tender green, and curving like a silver bow, by valley and woodland, chalky cliff and quaint nestling town, gray rock and mediæval castle, half-fortress, half-château.

Mademoiselle de Bergerac thought of this romantic land sometimes, and sighed for a

state of things that might bring about her father's return to his native country. For the exiled family she entertained a sentiment that was akin to adoration, confounding all distinction between *famille ainée* and *famille cadette;* and beholding in the quiet country gentlemen of Twickenham and Bushey the direct descendants of that bold warrior whose white plume flashed like a star athwart the serried ranks at Fontenoy.

But second only to her affection for that country whereof she knew so little, and which must always be more or less a dreamland for her, was Mademoiselle de Bergerac's affection for Berkshire, the land of her birth, the pastoral scene amidst which there was one corner, one quiet grave in a village churchyard —a grave above which there bloomed roses more beautiful than common flowers growing in common gardens—that must for ever make this one spot holier in her eyes than all other regions of this lower world. To keep her father's house, to supply in some measure the

place of that dear companion who was lost to him, to sustain the student's ambition, and to watch the scholar's health, meting out the midnight oil, and restraining the too eager spirit in the interests of the ill-used flesh,—in these things was comprised the desire of Helen de Bergerac's heart and mind.

She received her father's secretary with a most delightful cordiality, accepting this new member of the family with a grace as easy as if he had been some long-absent brother or cousin come from beyond seas to take his place in the household. Prudery and affectation were unknown to this sylvan damsel. She found it rather agreeable than otherwise to have a well-bred, well-informed young man in attendance upon her when she inspected her garden, or supervised the arrangement of a rustic banquet under the chestnuts on the lawn. She found it agreeable to be assisted in her reading by some one whose time was less occupied, and whose erudition was less alarming than her father's. She found it pleasant to have a

friend who went to the extremest lengths in the worship of Beethoven and Weber,—a friend who could discourse most eloquently of Hugo and Shakespeare, Bulwer and Göthe, Balzac and Thackeray, while her father dozed in the quiet summer twilights, wearied out by his long day's labour,—a friend who seemed, strange to say, always intensely interested in every subject that happened to interest her,—a knight-errant who, living perchance in a prosaic century, was fain to demonstrate his devotion by the clipping of faded rose-leaves, and the hunting out of recondite islands and promontories in the classic atlas,—a friend who, by some unerring instinct, contrived always to do and say precisely what she wished, —a friend who was always the right man in the right place.

"I don't know how it is, but it seems to me that I am always right," remarked the young Duchess of Burgundy with charming *naïveté;* and Mademoiselle de Bergerac on more than one occasion gave utterance to observations

quite as *naïf* on the subject of her new acquaintance.

"I really cannot tell how it is Mr. Thorburn always contrives to make himself so agreeable, papa," she said.

The simple-hearted book-worm was no less blind than his daughter.

"I am glad you like him, my love," he replied, carelessly. "I was rather afraid you might object to a third person in the house. He is a most admirable young man. For hunting out a reference or a quotation, he is, I think, unrivalled. I only hope I shall be able to keep him till my book is finished; but that will be a long time, Helen, a very long time—if I live to finish it at all."

"Dear, dear father," murmured the girl, tenderly; and then she continued, with some appearance of alarm, "Do you think Mr. Thorburn wishes to leave us?"

"No, my dear, I have no reason to think that. But he is very young, you know; and this must be a dull kind of life for a young man."

"And yet I am sure Mr. Thorburn is not unhappy. He had only just lost his mother, you know, when he came to us; and of course the memory of that loss makes him thoughtful and melancholy sometimes. But I am sure he is quite content to lead our quiet life, papa, and that he takes a very deep interest in your book. He told me the other day that he cannot venture to look forward to the end of that book; it seems to him like looking forward to the end of his life."

"It is, indeed, an interesting subject, my love," replied M. de Bergerac, with complacency, "and an almost inexhaustible one—the history of superstition: a mighty record, a vast survey, embracing the length and breadth of this earth, from the monstrous temples of the East to the classic shrines of the West—from the altar of the Carthaginian Æsculapius to the funeral pyre of the Scandinavian Balder. I am much pleased to think the young man likes his work. He is very clever."

"Is he not clever, papa? He wrote a little

poem the other day, and he asked my opinion of it. As if *my* opinion could be worth having! It was charming. I do not think your favourite Catullus, whom you praise so much, and yet will not allow me to read, could have written anything more graceful. It is full of that mournful langour that there is in some of Victor Hugo's minor poems, and in Longfellow's —a sweet, calm sadness that pierces one's heart."

"I am glad he distracts himself by the composition of verses," said the scholar. "There are some who consider such a course of reading as he is now engaged in dry and laborious; but to my mind there can be no better nurture for a poet. I trust Mr. Thorburn may achieve some kind of success in the future."

"I think he writes or studies a good deal at night, after you have done with him."

"How do you know that, my dear?"

"Through Susan, papa. She is always complaining about the candles. You know how economical she is; and I assure you Mr. Thor-

burn's consumption of candles is quite an affliction to her. I wonder whether the Grecian *ménagères* were angry when their lords consumed the midnight oil. Perhaps that was one of Xantippe's grievances. I don't think Socrates could have been a *very* agreeable husband."

"That point is open to discussion," said the scholar, slyly. "We possess the sage's opinion of Xantippe, but we do not possess Xantippe's opinion of the sage."

The weeks and months slipped by, and the fern was sear and brown in Windsor Great Park and Forest, and all the woodlands of Berkshire were leafless; but Eustace Thorburn showed no signs of distaste for his labours as secretary and amanuensis, collator and collaborateur. He languished for no change, he pined for no pleasure. His considerate employer had borrowed an extra horse from the stables of the great house, where there was still the remnant of a noble stud; and at his suggestion the young man took long rides in the

early morning, before the day's studious drudgery began. It was very pleasant to come home to breakfast in the snug old-fashioned parlour, and to be welcomed by Mademoiselle de Bergerac, whose bright eyes grew brighter at sight of some sprig of rare comb-bearing fern. Life at Greenlands seemed, indeed, to be altogether an existence of perfect and serene delight, only overshadowed now and then by the vague consciousness that it was too sweet to last.

"The time will come when I shall have to pack my portmanteau and bid her good-bye," the young man said to himself, in moments of sober meditation at night, when he sat alone in his pleasant room, and some break, some stagnation in the course of his composition brought him to a stand-still; "or some one will come and see her, and learn to love her as dearly as I love her even; and he will be in a position to say the sweet words I dare not say to her; and I shall hear the jangling village-bells some misty summer morning, and she will come in her white bridal dress to bid me farewell. Men

have to bear such pain as that, and to bear it quietly."

By these reflections it will be seen that Eustace Thorburn, without fortune, friends, or name, and with the ever-present consciousness of the bar-sinister on his escutcheon, had presumed to fall in love with the only child of his employer. Could he have done otherwise? "Lives there a wretch with soul so dead" as to be able to inhabit the same dwelling with a Helen de Bergerac for six months and not own himself her worshipper and slave ere the sixth month is ended? Eustace Thorburn had surrendered himself an unresisting victim to the pitiless goddess who sways the weak souls of men, as her kinswoman Artemis rules the tides of ocean. He had allowed himself to be cradled in the shadowy arms of Fancy, rocked to the sweetest sleep that was ever broken by bitter waking.

"I know that it must end in misery," he said to himself; "but it is so sweet—while it lasts."

He loved her, and he feared that his love was hopeless. Simple as M. de Bergerac's life might be, he bore upon him the stamp of the old *noblesse*. He was of that nation whose *dernière grand dame* died with Queen Marie-Amélie; and it was not to be supposed there was no latent pride of birth beneath that graceful humility of manner which rendered the exile so dear to the cottagers and peasant children about Greenlands.

"I think he would give his daughter to a poor man," thought Eustace, when he meditated this vital question; "for his soul seems to me so pure and noble as to be above all consideration of worldly wealth; and then Helen's simple habits fit her for a poor man's wife. But I cannot think that he would consent to an alliance with a man of low origin, or of unknown origin, which to that proud and pure mind would seem worse than the lowest, since it must bear the stigma of shame."

There were times when a hope—vague but exquisite—awoke in the young man's breast as

he pondered on the future. If he was nameless to-day, must he needs go nameless to the grave? Might he not win for himself a renown that would give grace and lustre to that simple family name of Thorburn, which he had seen on his grandfather's tombstone? Was it only a foolish presumption, the besotted vanity of a young pedant, which buoyed him up and supported him in his hours of depression? Was that word *Parvenir*, which he had taken for himself as his motto, and cherished in secret as the watch-word of his life, only the formula of a braggart? Was that pleasant land of dreams, in which he was wont to take refuge when the world of realities seemed dark and dreary, only a fool's paradise?

Insomuch as poetic dreams and aspirations can make a man a poet, Eustace Thorburn was a member of that glorious brotherhood which began with Homer; but it yet remained to be shown whether he were gifted with something more than the vague yearnings and lofty imaginings of the dreamer who would fain admit the

world within the mystic portals of his fair shadowland. To think high thoughts, to dream delicious dreams, is one thing; but to be able to translate thought and dream into the eloquent verse of a Byron, or the polished syllables of a Tennyson, is another thing. To how many eyes the Coliseum and the Adriatic, the Drachenfels and the quiet field that lies beyond Ardennes, may have seemed as fair as they appeared to the eyes of that one lonely traveller who has recorded his wanderings in words that can never die! How many brains must have been crowded by grand imaginings, how many hearts must have beat high with the dreamer's enthusiasm, as the youth of England have trodden the ground that is hallowed by the footsteps of heroes and demigods! and yet, of all the youth of England, there has been but one whose poetic record of his emotions has reached a second edition, and held a place in the memory of mankind. Of all the men who read the rugged legends of Macbeth and Lear, the Italian story of Othello's passion and Iago's cunning, there

was only one man who could give to the crude unshapely records life and form, immortal as his own genius!

Whether Eustace Thorburn possessed that subtle and wondrous power of expression, that mystic sympathy with the minds of his fellow-men, that marvellous perception which is a kind of clairvoyance, time alone could show. He had his moments of proud hope, his hours of abject depression; but he worked on patiently, steadily, devoting more than one quiet hour of every night to the composition of a narrative poem—dramatic, philosophical, passionate, and perhaps just a little tainted with the egotism which is so common in the work of youthful genius.

Eustace Thorburn had no suspicion that the hero of his poetic fiction was a shadow of himself, a projection of his own brain; but he knew that the heroine was an airy sister of Helen de Bergerac, and that the love of his Egbert for his Amy was very near a-kin to his own love for Helen.

There was no odour of the midnight oil in the poet's verses. They breathed the freshness of youth, the perfume of woods and groves; the harmonious lines were musical with the ripple of cool waters, the low sound of leafy branches swaying gently in the summer wind. The life which Eustace Thorburn led at Greenlands was the ideal existence for which the poet sighs, for which he yearns with fond imaginings, pent up in the darksome city counting-house, chained to the cruel wheel of distasteful labour. Nor was the young man ungrateful to Providence, or to the kindly kinsman who had procured for him so pleasant a position. He thanked God for his easy existence, his congenial labours; and he wrote sweet, playful letters, full of affection and gratitude, to Uncle Dan, who treasured those effusions, and was pleased to favour his friends and boon-companions with the recital of eloquent little bits in those delightful epistles.

"What would you give to be able to write like that, Tom Granger?" he said to one of his

associates. "You write uncommonly well, you know, dear boy, and so does John Harrington, and Ted Rochester, and Frank Dorset; and there's plenty of *chic* in all you do. You all write uncommonly well, Tom; you can all describe the things you see every day, *from the outside*, with a certain amount of smartness; but there is no more evidence of thought in your compositions than if you were so many copying-machines; and you all write so like one another, that if Frank wrote page one, and Ted page two, and John page three, no one but themselves and the compositors who set-up their copy would be any the wiser. You have all got the slang of the day, and you all write for the current market, and you are all wise in your generation. But the day will come when this boy here will show you that a writer may have something more than 'a knack,' and be something better than a publisher's 'clever hand.'"

"I wouldn't mind giving you long odds against that immaculate nephew of yours ever

writing a book that will sell," replied the incredulous Tom, in no wise put out of countenance by his friend's exordium. "They all begin in the same style, these young uns. Epic poem about King Arthur, or King Alfred, or King Athelstane, that is to be the Iliad of future generations,—high-falutin sentiment, pure aspirations, and so on. And they write their epic poems, and pass them on from one publisher's office to another, till the poor valueless manuscripts are limp and dirty; and then they learn to adapt themselves to the requirements of their generation, and turn into 'clever hands' like you and me, Dan. They must all go through the same apprenticeship, and 'learn in suffering what they teach in song,'—that is to say, learn in Whitecross Street what they teach in the monthly magazines, unless they happen to be careful souls, with snug little incomes: in which case they hug their sweet delusions to the last, and publish their epics at their own expense. Epic poems, forsooth! Do you think the Greeks would have read

Homer if they had possessed periodical literature?"

"I look upon periodical literature as the sworn foe to learning."

"You are not the first of dirty birds, Daniel Mayfield," cried his friend, sternly; "and now for the divine Louisa."

The "divine Louisa" was Mr. Granger's playful name for unlimited loo, a pastime which cost Daniel Mayfield many a five-pound note in the course of the year, but which he had not the moral courage to forswear. He had his reputation as a Bohemian, and he was too old to hope for a new reputation amongst the ranks of the respectable; so he was fain to be true to the brotherhood in which he had some *status*.

"Better to be a prince among the nomad tribes than a nobody among the Philistines," he said to himself. "One might submit to that, if the Philistines were a perfect race; but when a man sees how much malice and selfishness there may be in the Pharisees and Saddu-

cees, he is apt to prefer the society of publicans and sinners."

These were the arguments with which Daniel Mayfield was wont to stifle the upbraidings of conscience; for the sinner can forgive himself all his other sins more easily than the one sin of a wasted life. Mr. Mayfield had his hours of depression, his moments of savage bitterness; and to escape from these, he fled to the scenes he liked and the friends he loved—the friends who in some sort loved him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

Mrs. Jerningham spent her autumn at Spa, where Mrs. Colton, the amiable dragon, drank the waters with the patient regularity of a valetudinarian, and wondered at the Continental toilettes with the pious wonder of a well-bred provincial Englishwoman, to whom these daring eccentricities of custom—these *bottes à mi-jambe, en cuir de Russie*, these dainty braided jackets *à la Rigolboche*, these robes *à queue-sans-fin*, and *chapeaux à l'infiniment petit*—were all so much confusion, the climax of horror and infamy foreshadowed by the Prophet, the abomination of desolation sitting in the high places.

For Emily Jerningham, life at Spa seemed a very dull business. She had no pet ailment

to be subjugated by the mineral waters. The pine-woods and stately avenues were very beautiful on fine summer mornings, or beneath the broad glory of the harvest moon; but she had seen them before. It seemed to her as if she knew every pine on the steep hill-side, every branch of the lofty oaks in the valley, every hard, worldly face that was to be seen in the Kursaal. Was there not something wanting in her life, a something for lack of which she must needs be lonely and purposeless wherever she went?

All the pleasures and luxuries that wealth can buy; all the consideration that a good old name can exact; all the respect that a reputation which, despite an occasional shrug from some Rochefoucauld of this generation, may fairly be called stainless, can command—were at the disposal of this fortunate lady, and yet she was not happy. She had too much, and too little. If she had been an utterly selfish and narrow-minded woman, she might have found the perfection of bliss in splendid toilettes

and well-appointed equipages, an elegant house and distinguished acquaintance; but something more than these was necessary to complete the sum of Mrs. Jerningham's happiness.

"Of what use am I in the world?" she asked herself, wearily, as she drove her graceful pony-carriage through the crowd which admired and envied her. "I am an expense to my husband; a burden and a restraint for Laurence, who no doubt would have married before this, if it were not for me; and a weariness to myself."

Perhaps this unspoken lament might have been translated thus;

"I have been here a month, and Mr. Desmond has not found time to come to me. He writes me a hurried letter once in ten days, in which, under an unlimited amount of respect, I perceive the lurking poison of indifference; and I am too proud to tell him how intensely I wish to see him, too proud to confess even to myself the pain I suffer because of his absence."

In bidding adieu to Mrs. Jerningham and her companion at the London Bridge station on the morning of their departure, the editor of the *Areopagus* had declared that, if he could give himself a holiday, he would take that holiday at Spa; and the eyes of the younger lady had said "Do!" and the proud line of her lips had softened into a grateful smile.

"We shall expect to see you, Mr. Desmond," she said, at the very last, when he had brought her *Punch* and a damp copy of the newly issued *Areopagus*. Ah, how many a youthful scribbler's ardour has been damped by those cold clammy papers, deadly chill as the skin of the cobra, and venomous as his sting!

"We shall expect to see you—soon," repeated the lady, with that pretty air of insistance which is so charming in an elegant woman.

"But, my dear Mrs. Jerningham, I did not say I would come. I said, I will come, if I can get a holiday."

"As if any one could refuse you a holiday!

But I will not allow the arrangement to be left in that vague manner. Shall we see you in a week ?"

"I fear not."

"In a fortnight ?"

"I scarcely like to promise anything till this month is over. There are so many rows on the political *tapis ;* and we are bound to go in for an analysis of all the rows. And there is Cumberland's fourteenth volume of "Catharine II.;" that is a book I am pledged to review myself."

"Pledged to the author ?"

"No ; to the publisher. Do you think anyone on the *Areopagus* ever writes a review to oblige an author ? I think, in three weeks, I may be free ; and if——"

"Oh, pray do not imperil the fortunes of the *Areopagus* for any caprice of mine ! I am sure I should be immensely distressed if my pleasure interfered with the prompt notice of Mr. Cumberland's 'Catharine,'" cried Mrs. Jerningham, with supreme hauteur, and with the

injured air of a woman who thinks your regard for her must be very small, if at her behest you refuse to jeopardize a paltry newspaper which cost only twenty thousand pounds or so to establish, or the reputation of a trumpery author, who has only given the labour of a lifetime to his absurd book.

The Dover express moved away before Mr. Desmond could reply to the lady's angry speech, and left him standing on the platform, with a smile, that was half-sad, half-cynical, upon his face.

"They are all alike," he said to himself; "beautiful, delightful, unreasonable, and profoundly selfish. How well that tone of *grande dame* becomes her! How lovely she looked just now, with that crimson flush of wounded pride, and that angry light in her eyes! What a pity it is that a woman cannot believe in the regard of a man who is not ready to behave like an idiot in all the affairs of life for her pleasure! 'You pretend that you love me,' cries offended Beauty, 'and yet you won't for-

feit a colonelcy in the Life Guards in order to attend me to a garden-party at Miss Burdett Coutts's! You declare that you adore me, and yet refuse to make a bonfire of your father's family-seat for my amusement!' "

Mr. Desmond's mind was not altogether in his work that day, and more than once the remorseless pen of the editor lay idle in his hand, while he pondered on a subject which within the last year had become the unanswerable enigma of his existence. It was much easier for him to soothe Emily's doubts with pretty, reassuring speeches than to satisfy the perplexities of his own mind.

Was this lukewarm friendship an alliance that good men and pure-minded women could approve—this friendship which must needs be continually measured by the thermometer of the proprieties, lest it should become a degree or so warmer than society could warrant? Was it a fair and honourable thing, this tacit engagement, the fulfilment whereof was contingent on the death of a man whose hand

Laurence had taken in friendship many times in the past, whom he might meet with friendly greeting to-morrow? No, a thousand times no! Laurence Desmond was well aware that he occupied one of those false positions into which men sometimes slip unawares, and from which extrication is so difficult.

Could he bring himself to tell Emily Jerningham that this friendship was wrong, and that it lacked even the charm that sweetens some wrong-doing? Could he do this, could he inflict pain upon her, when his own conscience told him that the keen sense of the dishonour involved in his position had only arisen in his mind since the position itself had become wearisome to him?

Yes, this was the *mot de l'énigme*. He had loved her very dearly; but he loved her no longer. He looked backward to the days in which he had walked with her in the little garden at Passy, and thought how happy they might both have been if he had been less prudent, if he had obeyed the impulses of his

heart, instead of the hard axioms of the worldly-wise. The time and the opportunity were past and gone, and he felt that some part of his own youth and hope had gone with them.

He made his appearance at Spa when Mrs. Jerningham and Mrs. Colton had been at that pleasant watering-place for more than a month, and he was received somewhat coldly by the younger lady, who could not forgive him for doing his duty as editor of the *Areopagus*. But she soon melted. It was not possible that she should long conceal the delight she felt in his presence.

"I am angry with myself for being so glad to see you," she cried at last; "but, oh, you cannot imagine how dull and hopeless my life has been in this place! My poor aunt likes the humdrum gaiety, and the nauseous waters, and the dawdling drives, and the Tauchnitz novels; and I have stayed to please her. But more than once I have been tempted to take the train for Liége, and offer myself as a novice at

the first convent I came to after leaving the station. Why should I not go into a convent, or at least a béguinage? What use am I in the world?"

Hereupon Mr. Desmond had to reiterate the old protestations, to the effect that the lady's friendship was the pride and happiness of his life, and that to him, at least, she was a person of supreme importance—the very pole-star, or guiding influence, of his life; and then, after speaking to her with great warmth and kindness, he began to lecture her a little upon the emptiness of her existence.

"You would not be so foolish as to imagine these things, if you were more employed, Emily," he said.

"How shall I employ myself?" asked the lady, with an incredulous laugh. "Shall I tat? The tatting of our great-grandmothers has come into fashion. I have tried it, and for a little while it seemed really delightful; but there is a time when one gets tired even of that. I have worked screens in Berlin wool

with beads—or have begun them ; my aunt has a knack of finishing my work. I paint ever so little in water-colours ; but after sitting in a damp meadow for two or three hours, exposed to a midsummer sun, the result is only that I hate myself because I am not Creswick. And with music it is the same. The morning-concerts spoil one for amateur music. I devoted last summer to the harmonium—I suppose because there is such a rage for it ; but it was like the tatting—there came a stage at which it seemed all weariness. If it were not for my orchids, I think I should go melancholy mad ; but for the cultivator of orchids there can be no such thing as satiety until all the forests on the shores of the Amazon have been rifled by exploring botanists."

"Don't you think it just possible you might find a better source of interest even than orchids?" suggested the editor, gravely. "Your fellow-creatures, for instance—a little sympathy for them might not be thrown away."

"You mean that I should turn district-visitor,

and go about with tracts and packets of tea and sugar," replied the lady, listlessly. "My aunt does all that. She is a clergyman's widow, you know, and that kind of thing is very easy to her. My maid goes with her sometimes, and tells me dreadful things about the poor people, as she brushes my hair—the St. Anthony's fires and St. Vitus's dances, and wens and whitlows, and frightful complaints that they suffer from: and really there seems a particular class of diseases that poor people have entirely to themselves, just as if they have a copyright in them, you know. I am sure I am very sorry for the poor creatures; and when there is anything out of the common way, we send money; besides which, our rector knows that my cheque-book is at his service in any emergency. I cannot see that I should do any particular good by walking about in the hot sun with tracts."

"I dare say, so far as your own parish goes, you and your aunt are ministering angels, my dear Emily; but you see that is a very narrow sphere, and there are people of a higher class

than those you help who may have more need of your sympathy."

"If you are going to ask me to be philanthropic, I warn you at once that it is useless," exclaimed the lady, with a little cry of alarm. "I have not the elements of the philanthropist. I do not care the least in the world for woman's rights; and if I had the privilege of an electress to-morrow, I should—what do you call it?—plump unblushingly for the man who could offer me a new orchid. I do not care about female printers or female doctors. I think it very sad that poor seamstresses should work in stuffy rooms until they fade and die; but I can only pity them, and send money to the newspapers for them, or for their survivors. I have not strength of mind enough to be of any practical use to them."

Mr. Desmond sighed. He saw no remedy for the weariness of spirit from which Mrs. Jerningham suffered. Did not Madame de Maintenon complain of a like weariness when she was the envied of all French men and

women, thereby drawing upon herself a trenchant and somewhat impious remark from her brother D'Aubigné? She was happier, perhaps, in the old days, before Scarron pitied and married her—the days in which she did or did not share the chamber of Ninon de l'Enclos.

"I do not ask you to take up the human race," said Mr. Desmond, after a pause; "but I think your life is too—pardon me if I say egotistical. If you had more friends—I don't mean visitors; you have plenty of them,—but intimate acquaintance—intimate enough to fly to you in their perplexities, to consult you in their social arrangements, and to—"

"They would only bore me."

"Perhaps; but they would occupy you, they would take you out of yourself; and even when they were dullest and most obnoxious, they would give a keener zest to your hours of solitude. Depend upon it, one must consent to be bored now and then, in order to appreciate the rapture of not being bored. I am sure, Emily, you would be happier if you took a little more

interest in the affairs of your neighbours, or if you had more people dependent on your kindness."

"You may be right," returned the lady, listlessly; "but I do not care for my neighbours. I cannot bring myself to sympathize with their serio-comic woes about recalcitrant butlers and flaunting housemaids. Nor have I any dependents whom my kindness could benefit. My father and I were the only poor members of the family, and there is no one who would care to profit by my prosperity."

What could be said after this? Laurence Desmond felt that this lonely lady's life wanted a something that gives form and purpose to the lives of other women. Existence for Emily Jerningham had been made too easy, and, extremes meeting in this as in all other cases, it was fast becoming difficult. She was like some dowager sultana, wearied of palace and gardens, fountains and slaves, peacocks and birds of paradise. All the ease and luxury of her life palled on her, and that most fatal of moral

diseases, discontent, was fast gaining a hold upon her mind. That old story of the greedy apprentice in the pastrycook's shop is a fable of wide application. The boy fancies he can never be weary of an existence that is all raspberry-tarts and bath-buns; and being let loose in his master's shop, makes himself bilious in a week, and hates the sight of a raspberry-tart ever afterwards.

There had been a time when Miss Jerningham, sadly restricted in all the aspirations of young-ladyhood, had believed that an open account with a West-end milliner, a perfectly appointed barouche for the Park, and a miniature brougham for shopping, must constitute the supreme good of earthly existence; but after half a dozen years' enjoyment of these blessings, she discovered that the most accomplished of milliners, and the most perfect of establishments, cannot give happiness. The toy-villa at Hampton was a place to dream of; but its mistress found the hours intolerably long in those Paradisaic gardens, the evenings unutter-

ably weary in that fairy drawing-room, the drives by Bushey and Richmond, Kingston and Chertsey, very little gayer than the prisoner's tramp in the grim gaol-yard, under surveillance of a hard-visaged warder.

The lady had nothing to do. If she read a volume of a novel, and paid a few visits, or received a few callers, to-day, she could only look forward to another volume, and another visit, or visitor, to-morrow. The days were all alike, and they left no mark behind them. When a year came to an end, Mrs. Jerningham told herself that she was twelve months older than when it began, and that was the sole effect the passage of time could exercise upon her fate.

"It is all very well for Laurence to be happy and active," she said to herself. "He has that odious *Areopagus* to interest him, and the hope of going into parliament by and by. He is getting rich, and has had the excitement of earning his money. He has his social triumphs and his literary successes, the friendship of great men. It is always the same story. *They*

have 'the court, camp, church; the vessel and the mart; sword, gown, gain, glory;' and we have only the London Library and Jaques's croquet."

Mr. Desmond stayed a fortnight at Spa, and then hurried back to the British Isles, being "due" at a ducal palace in the Highlands—a grand old château, romantic as a picture by Gustave Doré. To say that he assured Mrs. Jerningham he had not the faintest expectation of deriving pleasure from this visit, and that he went to Scotland simply because the political interests of the *Areopagus* obliged him to stalk the duke's deer and shoot the duke's grouse, is only to say that he was a *man*.

Within a week from his departure Mrs. Jerningham and her companion also turned their backs upon the romantic Belgian valley. Emily would have liked much to make the return journey under the escort of the editor; but this would have just a little outstepped the bounds of this carefully regulated friendship, and Mr. Desmond was too profoundly

versed in the philosophy of his own world to suggest the measure. He knew exactly how much would be permitted to himself and the woman he—had loved, and still hoped to marry; and he adhered closely to the letter of that unwritten law which is Society's Koran.

When autumn was fast fading into the chill gray of early winter, Mr. Desmond came back to town, and resumed his visits at the Hampton villa, where his pleasure and his caprices were studied with affectionate solicitude, but where a good deal was exacted from him in return for this solicitude. If Mrs. Jerningham for her part paid a certain price for Laurence Desmond's friendship, so surely did he for his part pay somewhat heavily for the honour and privilege of the lady's regard.

In plain English, she was jealous. The agony which neither "mandragora nor all the drowsy syrups of the East" can lull to rest was the agony that racked the soul of Emily Jerningham. Little wonder that the pleasures and luxuries of her life palled upon her. There

was a poison in her cup which flavoured every joy and embittered every pleasure. All the petty doubts and frivolous misgivings of the jealous mind harassed this lady's quiet days, and tormented her through the slow hours of her wakeful nights. She was miserable when Laurence Desmond was away from her; she was restless and anxious when he was with her. If he were grave, she fancied him bored by her society; if he were especially gay, her demon-familiar suggested that his gaiety might be assumed. She tortured him by her eager curiosity about the manner in which his life was spent when he was away from her. She insulted him by the air of incredulity with which she received his answers. The mention of some beautiful or distinguished woman whom he had met in society sufficed to fan the flame that was always burning.

"Why do you pretend not to admire Laura Courtenay, and why do you give your shoulders that depreciating shrug when you talk of Lady Sylvester?" she would exclaim, with suppressed

anger. "Do you think I am deceived by that kind of thing? You dined at the Sylvesters' four times last season; and you are always dancing attendance upon those Courtenay girls, though you make quite a favour of coming here once a week. I shall ask Laura and Julia Courtenay to stay with me next summer, and then perhaps I shall be honoured by your society."

Of course Mr. Desmond did his uttermost to satisfy the lady's doubts and cheer her spirits; but he found it not a little wearisome to repeat the same protestations, the same assurances, week after week, to very small effect.

"If I could see Emily contented and happy," he said to himself, "I should be the last to count the cost of our friendship; but her tears, and misgivings, and accusations harass and worry me almost beyond endurance."

Nor did Mr. Desmond feel thus without justification. The lady's jealousy might, indeed, be the strongest possible evidence of her affection, but it was an evidence which Lau-

rence Desmond could have gladly dispensed with.

"Surely there must be within the limits of possibility a love that means peace, trust, unselfishness. Is every woman like Emily, exacting, suspicious, insatiable of devotion and protestation, for ever on the watch to discover falsehood and hypocrisy in the man who loves her? Poor girl! I am hard and cruel perhaps, when I blame her. These doubts and suspicions may be some of the penalties of our position. There can be no true union of hearts where there is a separation of existences. It is all very well to talk sentimental balderdash about the union of souls, the sympathy of minds that think alike, the sighs that are wafted from Indus to the Pole; but, in spite of poetry and metaphysics, real union means the family breakfast-table, the daily dinner, the constitutional walk, the drowsy home-evening when there are no visitors, the summer trip to Switzerland, the quiet, half-tearful talk in the big, darkened bedroom when first the faint squeal of

babyhood is heard in the family mansion. Out upon Platonic friendship between men and women who have once knelt together at the shrine of Venus! It is a delusion, a mockery, a lie! There is no union except marriage."

This was the shape which Mr. Desmond's reflections were wont to assume after a painful interview with Emily Jerningham. She loved him, and she would fain have believed in his love, but her familiar demon would not allow her so much peace, such pure delight. If Laurence succeeded in convincing her of his truth and devotion to-night, and left her at the gate of her pretty garden, smiling and happy, after a cordial pressure of her soft white hand, it was as likely as not that an hour's solitary promenade and contemplation in the same pretty garden would enable the lady to develop new doubts and misgivings from her inner consciousness, which would result in a melancholy letter of five or six pages, written that night, and delivered next morning at Mr. Desmond's late breakfast.

Those who knew the editor of the *Areopagus*, and knew or guessed his position *auprès de* Mrs. Jerningham, envied and hated him as the most fortunate of literary highflyers. What more could he desire? Had he not the regard of one of the handsomest and best-bred women in London, who would in all probability come in for a princely fortune whenever Jerningham should go off the hooks? Mr. Desmond was the last of men to admit the pinching of the shoe which he wore with so good a grace. No one among his intimates ventured the impertinence of a congratulation; but it was a generally understood thing that he was supremely happy, and that Mrs. Jerningham's friendship was a blessing which he would not have bartered for a kingdom. And while his friends were permitted to suppose this, Laurence Desmond was profoundly miserable.

"How will it end?" he asked himself sometimes; "and will it ever end?"

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS ST. ALBANS.

As an individual who, by arduous and unremitting labour—by the sweat of his brow and the ceaseless working of his brain—had contrived to secure for himself a decent income in the present and a moderate provision for the future, Mr. Desmond was of course a fitting mark for the arrows of that free-lance of modern civilization—the begging-letter writer. Men and women whose faces he had never seen wrote him pitiful letters, or impudent letters, as the case might be, urging requests which, if all or even half of them had been granted, would speedily have left him penniless. That he should have those of his own kith or kin—that he should have personal friends, or benefactors of the past with powerful claims upon him in

the present—that he should have obligations to discharge, or debts to pay, or artistic tastes to gratify, never entered the heads of these poor needy people. His name and address were in the Directory, and he was supposed to be tolerably well off; so there was no more to do but to procure a sheet of paper and a penny stamp, and entreat of him the loan or donation of any given number of pounds, from five to a hundred.

These applications were as painful to Mr. Desmond as such applications must always be to a man who has power to feel the extent of human want and wretchedness around and about him, without the power to relieve it. He read the piteous letters with a sigh, and passed them over to his sub-editor, who answered every appeal with the same polite formula. Laurence Desmond was not a hard man, however, and to an appeal that came from an old friend or fellow-worker he never turned a deaf ear.

Such an appeal came to him one dull, wintry

morning after his return from the ducal château in Scotland. Among his letters there was a very painful one from Mrs. Jerningham, with the usual jealous murmurs, the oft-repeated complaints of neglect. This he read with a thoughtful brow, and laid aside with a sigh so heavy as to be almost a groan.

"I am tired of protestation and justification," he said to himself; "there must be an end of these letters. If she doubts my truth because I spend half a dozen days without going to her, she can have little power to appreciate the unselfishness of my regard in the three long years in which I have made myself her slave. There must come an end to a bondage that is intolerable to me, and only a source of unhappiness to her."

The rest of Mr. Desmond's letters, with one exception, were on business connected with his journal. This one exception was a letter addressed in a hand that was very familiar to him.

"My old coach, Tristram Alford!" he cried, as he tore open the envelope. "I wonder how

the poor fellow has been getting on since the old days at Henley, when Max Waldon, Frank Lawsley, and I were there with our boat, reading for 'Greats.' I suppose he has been writing a book, or doing a translation of a Greek tragedy, and wants me to give him a lift. It's a long time since I've heard anything of him."

This was the tutor's letter :—

"My dear Desmond,—If I had not already tested and proved the goodness of your heart when I appealed to you some three or four years since for a loan,—which I then hoped would have been of a temporary character, but which, I regret to remember, has not yet been liquidated,—I should not now venture to address you as a suppliant.

"The favour which I am now about to ask is not of a pecuniary kind, and it is a favour which will be very easy for you to grant. You remember my little girl Lucy, who was so fond of your dogs and boats, and who used to sit listening with open eyes and mouth when we

were construing *Sophocles*. The little rogue had an innate love of the drama, and performed the part of Electra with a metal tea-pot in a most affecting manner. Well, my dear boy, that inborn dramatic taste, which showed itself when the child was in pinafores, has grown with her growth; and when old enough to consider the question of getting her own living,—the generous-minded child being sensitively averse to remaining a burden to me,—she decided on becoming an actress.

"I need scarcely inform you, my dear Desmond, that such an idea was to me, at the first blush, absolute HORROR; but when my sweet girl urged her predilection for the drama, and reminded me of the handsome fortunes realized by Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, Miss O'Neill, and other professors of that classic art, I relented, and allowed Lucy to have her own way. The dear girl had educated herself and reared herself, as it were, with so little help from me, that it would have seemed ill in me to frustrate her hopes by my cold reasoning or

timid doubts. Nor had I any very agreeable alternative to offer her. My circumstances have year by year become more embarrassed since that pleasant summer we spent together at Henley, and the home which I can provide for my only child is of the poorest. Was I, then, to stand in the way of her advancement?

"To make a long story short, I yielded, and have since that time devoted my best energies to my dear girl's service. She is but nineteen, and has already appeared at the Theatres Royal, Stony Stratford, Market Deeping, Oswestry, and Stamford, with considerable success. Her sympathies are with the buskin, rather than with the sock; but at Oswestry she performed the part of Lady Teazle, and received much applause from an appreciative, although somewhat limited, audience.

"We have now essayed a bolder venture. My Lucy has obtained, with inordinate difficulty, a London engagement. I had, in my ignorance of the dramatic world, fondly ima-

gined that a young person of unmistakeable genius had only to apply to the manager of one of the patent theatres, in order to be placed at once upon the boards that Siddons trod. But I find, alas! that in most cases it is only after years of patient and ill-paid drudgery in small provincial towns the dramatic aspirant works his or her way to the metropolis,—nay, indeed, there are many who never reach that splendid goal, but who journey through life as the favourite actor of the Theatre Royal, Market Deeping or Oswestry, and who are not ill-pleased with their renown.

"But to return. My daughter's engagement will be a brief one; but she is to appear in a wide range of the drama, in conjunction with Mr. Henry de Mortemar, a gentleman of some local celebrity, though as yet unknown to the metropolitan critics. The theatre is an obscure one, and Lucy must speedily return to the drudgery of a provincial stage unless some powerful and friendly hand shall be interposed in her behalf. Yours, my good friend, is the

influence which I would solicit for my dear child. A word from you would doubtless immediately secure a profitable engagement at one of the West-end theatres. I beseech you, for the sake of 'auld lang syne,' to say that all-powerful word, and to confer a lasting obligation on your poor old friend and tutor,

"TRISTRAM ALFORD.

"*Paul's Terrace, Islington, Nov.* 14, 186—"

"Poor Alford!" murmured the editor, somewhat touched by the earnestness of this appeal. "So he has allowed his daughter to go on the stage, and cherishes the fond delusion that she must needs be a Siddons or an O'Neill, because she has a childish fancy for gas-lamps and spangled petticoats. Yes, I remember the little girl—an angular chit in brown holland; a nice little girl, I think she was, with pretty, dreamy, blue eyes, and shy, childish ways, but an embryo blue-stocking, nevertheless. I have a faint recollection of her playing at Electra with the tea-pot one night, when she did not

know that Waldon and I were looking at her. Well, I'll do all I can. The West-end managers are *tant soit peu difficile* now-a-days; but as the *Areopagus* comes down rather savagely upon the modern drama and its professors now and then, they may strain a point to oblige me. I suppose the most friendly way of going to work would be to call on poor Alford."

When his morning's work was over, Mr. Desmond took a hansom from the nearest stand, and rattled up to the topmost heights of Islington, where, after considerable difficulty and aggravating waste of time, the cabman found Paul's Terrace, a shabby little row of newly built houses, on the road to Ball's Pond. The tutor, whom Mr. Desmond remembered the occupant of a pretty cottage near Henley, must indeed have fallen upon evil fortunes.

"Mr. Halford 'ave just stepped hout," said a grimy-looking servant-girl who opened the door; "but he won't be gone long, sir; which Miss Sent Halbans is in the parlour. P'r'aps you'd like to wait?"

"Well, yes, I think I had better wait," replied the editor, disinclined to sacrifice his afternoon without benefit to his old friend.

The girl opened a door, and admitted Mr. Desmond into a very small parlour, powerfully perfumed with stale tobacco, and occupied by a young lady, who was standing by the window, with a little book in her hand.

This must of course be the Miss St. Albans of whom the servant had spoken,—a visitor or hanger-on of the old tutor, perhaps. Laurence Desmond wondered how Mr. Alford came to burden himself with a visitor, and how the visitor came by so fine a name.

Miss St. Albans was a fair-haired young lady, with a slight, girlish figure, and one of those faces which some people call "sweetly pretty," and some only "interesting,"—a tender, winning countenance, with soft blue eyes and lovely mouth, but without the splendour of complexion and feature which attract universal admiration and secure immediate attention. Nor was this young lady's appearance rendered

striking by the art of milliner or mantua-maker. Upon her person, as upon the room she occupied, poverty had set its stamp. She wore a brown merino dress that had seen much service, and her head-dress was of the most unsophisticated order, consisting only of a small forest of curl-papers.

Mr. Desmond wondered to behold this exploded style of head-gear, and wondered still more at the manner of the young person, who started and blushed at sight of him, and then came towards him, with a certain hesitation and timidity that were not unpleasing.

"Mr. Desmond, I think?" she faltered.

"Yes, my name is Desmond."

"Ah," murmured the damsel in curl-papers, somewhat regretfully, "I see you have quite forgotten me."

"Forgotten you! I don't think that could have been possible, if I had ever had the honour to know you, Miss St. Albans," replied the editor, smiling very kindly; for there was something in the girl's candid and yet modest

demeanour which pleased this *blasé habitué* of West-end drawing-rooms.

"*If* you had ever known me!" cried the young lady, reproachfully. "Then you have quite forgotten Henley, and our boat, and Champion, the Scotch terrier, and——"

"Not at all. I have a lively recollection of Henley and of Champion; but I cannot recall the name of St. Albans."

"Ah, no, I forgot that the name is strange to you. But I must be very much altered since those happy days, or you would scarcely have forgotten Lucy."

"Lucy—Lucy Alford!"

"Yes, Mr. Desmond. The Lucy to whom you used to be so kind."

"Was I kind? You are very good to think so. And you are really Miss Alford, my dear old tutor's daughter? Let me shake hands in token of our renewed friendship. Yes, I have a vague recollection of a very nice little girl, who had the prettiest blue eyes, and wore the cleanest holland pinafores in Christendom;

and I am quite charmed to behold the same young lady, now she has outgrown the pinafores, but not the eyes."

"You have only a vague recollection of me; yet I knew you directly you stepped out of the cab," said the girl, in a tone of disappointment.

"Yes, but you are more changed than I, Miss Alford. You must consider what a gulf there is between seven and nineteen; while there is not much outward difference between twenty-three and thirty-five. Thirty-five is only so much dustier, and grayer, and shabbier; like a garment that has been worn and faded by continued hard wear."

"Indeed you do not look worn and faded," said the tutor's daughter, with an involuntary glance at the hot-house flower in the fashionable editor's faultless overcoat.

"I received a letter from your father this morning, Miss Alford; and I thought my best course would be to answer it in person. I am all the more happy to attend to my old

friend's request because your interests are involved in it."

Lucy blushed again—not the blush of self-consciousness or coquetry, but the honest red of innocent gratitude and impulsive feeling.

"It was very, very kind of you to come," she said. "Papa has told me how valuable your time is, and what a high position you hold on the press. He had no idea that you would respond so quickly to his appeal; and—and I am sure I ought to apologize for receiving you in these horrible curl-papers. They are for Pauline."

"For Pauline!"

"Yes, I play Pauline to-night in the *Lady of Lyons*, you know; and she is always played in ringlets—I don't exactly know why."

"Pray do not apologize for the curl-papers. I know there is a prejudice against them; but I really think them becoming in your case. And so you play Pauline to-night? I remember seeing Helen——"

"Oh, please don't!" cried the girl, with a

pretty look of piteous supplication; "every one says that. 'My dear,' the ladies at the theatre say to me, 'I have seen Miss Faucit in that character; and, without wishing to wound your feelings, I am bound to tell you that if you knew how *she* played the cottage-scene, you would go home and cut your throat.' At least that's what Mrs. M'Grudder, who plays old women on the Oswestry circuit, said to me after—after I came off, so pleased at having been applauded."

"The old harridan! I suppose she is a very great actress herself, this Mrs. M'Grudder."

"Oh, no; she speaks the broadest, broadest Scotch; and in Lady Macbeth the boys in the gallery laugh at her dreadfully."

"Then I do not think you need be made unhappy by that lady's sneers. Are you very fond of acting?"

"I love it dearly, and I hope some day to get on, for papa's sake. But I find the life of an actress much harder than I thought, and it is very difficult to get on. And I am so nervous."

"You are afraid of your audience?"

"Oh, no, I don't so much mind them; it is of the other actors and actresses I am most afraid."

"Indeed."

"Yes; they come to the wings and watch me; and then they tell me what they think; and they give me advice; and somehow they always contrive to make me miserable. I am sure sometimes, when I have been playing Ophelia, and have been quite carried away by the part, fancying that I have loved a prince and been forsaken by him, and that my father has been killed, and I am mad, I have happened to look towards the prompt entrance and see Mrs. M'Grudder standing there staring at me in her dreadful stony way, and have heard her say, 'St—st—st!' quite loud, and it has made me break down directly. You see, most actors and actresses have been a long time in the profession, and they have a kind of prejudice against amateurs and novices, and try to put them down. Mrs. M'Grudder had two

daughters in the theatre, who both wanted to play the juveniles, and I suppose that's what made her so unkind to me."

"But I suppose you have done with Mrs. M'Grudder now you have come to London?"

"Oh, no, I fear not. My engagement at the Oxford-road Theatre is only for a fortnight. Mr. Mortemar has taken the house at his own risk, you know, in order to introduce himself to a London public; and when the season is over, I must go back to the country—and most likely to the Oswestry circuit—unless I can get a permanent engagement in town."

She glanced at Mr. Desmond when she said this, as much as to say, "You are the all-powerful benefactor who can procure for me that inestimable boon."

Laurence Desmond understood the meaning of that look, and replied to its appeal.

"If any influence of mine can get you the engagement you want, you shall not be long without it," he said, kindly. "I don't think

you'll find any Mrs. M'Grudders at the Pall Mall or the Terence."

Mr. Alford came in while Laurence was saying this. He was an elderly man, and he looked older than he was, by reason of the whiteness of his straggling locks, and the stooping attitude which had become habitual to his tall frame. He was a man who bore upon him the unmistakeable stamp of gentle blood—a man whose good breeding no shabbiness of attire could disguise; and it must be confessed that he was very shabby.

"My dear Desmond," he cried, delighted to recognize his old pupil, "this is more than kind! I expected kindness from you, but not such promptitude as this."

"I should be very ungrateful if I were otherwise than prompt, when I remember how well you pulled me through when I was reading for 'Greats' twelve years ago," answered Laurence, heartily. "Miss Alford and I have renewed our old acquaintance, and have become very confidential. I have pledged myself to do my utter-

most on her behalf, and if a West-end engagement is her supreme desire, I think I can promise to gratify her wishes through my kind friend Hartstone, of the Theatre Royal, Pall Mall. But I cannot promise to secure her such characters as Pauline or Ophelia. Hartstone is one of the best fellows in Christendom, but he will think he does a good deal for friendship if he gives Miss Lucy some pretty little young-lady-like part in a *lever du rideau*."

And hereupon Miss Alford murmured that to appear at the Pall Mall would be the honour and delight of her existence, however insignificant the character she might be permitted to perform. After this Mr. Desmond and his old tutor entered upon a very pleasant conversation about the coaching days at Henley, and the three jolly young fellows who had boated and read with Laurence at the Henley villa.

"Poor Max Waldon was ploughed," said the editor. "He was asked who Saul was. 'Which Saul?' asked Max, in that sweetly calm way of his; 'Saul of Tarsus?' 'No, sir; King Saul,'

replied the examiner, sternly. 'Oh,' said Max, 'he was not a bad sort of fellow, only he had a nasty trick of throwing javelins at one.' And they ploughed him; but he is doing wonders at the Equity bar, notwithstanding. Lawsley died at Pau the year after he took his degree; and I fear the 'Varsity training and pedestrianism had something to do with the decline that carried him off."

The reminiscences of the Long Vacation seemed by no means unpleasant to Lucy Alford. She took up her work—it was Pauline's bridal veil that she was patching and darning for the evening's performance—and sat quietly by while her father and his pupil talked; but every now and then her face kindled, and she looked up with a smile that meant, "I too remember that."

Mr. Desmond had been sitting in the shabby little lodging-house parlour a long time, when he stole a look at his watch, and was surprised to discover the lateness of the hour.

"I should like to see you play Pauline to-

night, Miss Alford," he said, as he shook hands with his tutor's daughter.

Lucy blushed, and looked at her father.

"The *Market Deeping Examiner* compared her to Helen Faucit, Desmond, and I doubt if any lady except Miss Faucit could touch Lucy's Pauline."

"Papa, how can you say such things!" cried the girl. "Please do not laugh at him, Mr. Desmond. I like the part of Pauline so much, and — and I should like you to be in the theatre to-night, only I know you will make me nervous."

"What! do you place me in the same category as Mrs. M'Grudder?"

"O no, no, no! Only——"

"Only what?"

"I should be so anxious to please you; and the more I wished to please you, the more nervous I should be."

"I suppose that is the penalty I am to pay for my editorial position. Very well, Miss Alford, I shall not say whether I am coming to

the theatre to-night; but look out for the *Areopagus* next Saturday morning, and——"

"And expect a washing," cried the old tutor, rejoicing in the 'Varsity slang.

"Good-bye, Miss Lucy," said Laurence, lingering over these adieux just a little more than was necessary. "Oh, by the way, I have not had the pleasure of seeing your friend Miss St. Albans after all. Is she too a member of the dramatic profession?"

Mr. Alford and his daughter laughed heartily at this question.

"The girl has one requisite for comedy if she can laugh like that on the stage," thought the editor.

"I am Miss St. Albans," said Lucy; "St. Albans is my stage name, you know. I really thought you understood that just now."

"Not at all; I fully believed in Miss St. Albans as a separate entity. And so that is your *nom de théatre!*—rather a high-sounding name, is it not?"

Mr. Alford blushed.

"Well, my dear boy, they like fine names, you see," he explained, "the managers and the public. In point of fact, they will have something that looks well in the play-bills. St. Albans—De Mortemar: of course the more enlightened public are aware that those are not real names; but they go down, my dear Desmond, they go down."

"I can only hope that the happiness of Miss Alford may be promoted by the success of Miss St. Albans," said the editor of the *Areopagus*, as he made his farewell bow to the young lady in curl-papers.

Mr. Alford accompanied him to the street-door, and apologized for his inability to invite his old pupil to dinner.

"The world has not used me too well, Desmond, as you must perceive," he said; "and yet I have worked my hardest. I have a couple of tragedies in my desk that might conduce to the revival of original dramatic literature in this country; but the ignorance and prejudice of theatrical managers are not easily

overcome. I look to my daughter's genius to elevate the English stage. She is a star, my dear Desmond—a newly-risen star; but one that will shine far and wide before long, if she has a chance. Go and see her to-night at the Oxford, and you will find that her poor old father does not exaggerate her merits."

"Yes, I will go," answered Laurence, smiling at the old man's enthusiasm. "You must let me give you this, Alford, to—to make things a little pleasanter while you stay in town, for 'auld lang syne.'"

It was a cheque for twenty pounds in his friend's favour, which Mr. Desmond contrived to crush into the old man's hand as he said this. He was gone before Tristram Alford could find time to thank him or remonstrate with him; but the help thus offered by friendship was too sweet to be rejected by pride, nor was Tristram Alford a man who had ever cherished that particular sin amongst the deadly seven. There were tears—grateful

tears—in the old man's eyes when he went back to his daughter.

"That noble-hearted fellow has given me twenty pounds, Lucy, he said; "we can rub on comfortably for the next six weeks."

To "rub on comfortably" had been Mr. Alford's highest notion of financial prosperity for the last thirty years. He was a man upon whom the burden of youthful debts, the penalties of juvenile indiscretion, had pressed so heavily as to frustrate every attempt at progress in the race of life. Poor at school, poor at college, poor in youth, and poor in middle age, Tristram Alford had come at last to accept Poverty as a fellow-traveller, whose companionship must needs be endured to the end of the troublesome journey. The utmost he asked of Providence was a brief interval of rest and refreshment at some wayside inn, while his companion of the chain waited for him at the door.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE GREEN-ROOM.

It happened that the day on which Mr. Desmond paid his visit to Paul's Terrace, Islington, was a day unmarked by any particular engagement. There had been a time when he was only too glad to snatch such a day for a quiet afternoon at the Hampton villa; but he no longer felt the same alacrity when the occasion offered itself. He was still fully alive to the fact that Mrs. Jerningham was one of the handsomest and most elegant women he had ever seen, and that to be preferred by her was an honour; but to be submitted to the slow torture of the domestic inquisition is none the less painful because the inquisitor-in-chief is a beautiful woman, from whose fair lips the victim had hoped to hear sweet words instead

of captious questionings and ungenerous reproaches.

Thus did it come to pass that Mr. Desmond, having no imperative claim on his leisure, found himself at the doors of the Oxford Road Theatre, within two or three hours of his visit to Mr. Alford's lodging. He had eaten a hurried dinner at his club, and had driven thence to the Oxford, which house of entertainment was to be found amidst a labyrinth of streets northward of Cumberland Gate.

It is not a fashionable theatre, but amongst the inhabitants of the immediate district it is at times a very popular resort; while there are other times in which this temple of the drama fades and languishes for lack of public patronage, in common with more brilliant temples of the same order. It is a theatre whose normal splendour is ever and anon brightened by the extra brilliancy of some wandering star, whose name, all renowned though it may be in the district, is comparatively unknown to the ears of fashionable play-

goers, or known only as a bye-word and a reproach.

The great T. N. Buffboote, better known to his admirers as Brayvo Buffboote, is a favourite at the Oxford. Miss Marian Fitz-Kemble, the celebrated lady Lear, here performs her round of tragedy, from Macbeth to Julius Cæsar, with much satisfaction to herself and her friends. Here has the famous Transatlantic equestrian, best known to fame as the divine Miss Godiva Jones, pranced and galloped in her celebrated performances of Dick Turpin and Timour the Tartar. Here in the summer months, when the closing of West-end theatres affords a brief respite to manager and company, there come occasionally actors and actresses of higher repute, eager to gather new laurels in these untrodden regions, and not ill pleased to find themselves received with noisy rapture and outspoken admiration by the ruder gods and homelier goddesses of a threepenny gallery.

But while stars may come and stars may go

at the Oxford Road Theatre, there is a regular company which goes on for ever, glad to be tragical with Miss Fitz-Kemble, melodramatic with the great Buffboote, or equestrian with the divine Godiva, as the case may be—a company which takes life as it comes, and asks no more from existence than that its swift-recurring Saturday shall witness the payment of every man's salary.

Urged by the promptings of a fiery and ambitious soul, Mr. de Mortemar had been induced to take the Oxford Road Theatre at the very deadest and dullest time of the year—that dreary pause in the theatrical season which precedes the glory of Boxing-day—that fag-end of the year, during which the combined forces of a Macready and a Charles Mathews would scarcely suffice to illumine the profound darkness that foreshadows the rising of that brilliant luminary, the genuine face-distorting, policeman-overturning, baby-squashing, redhot-poker-brandishing, parcel-snatching, crinoline-flourishing Christmas clown—that wonder of wit

and humour, who convulses his audience by asking them what they had for dinner the day after to-morrow, or by some sarcastic inquiry about a missing fourpenny-piece.

Mr. de Mortemar had a soul above such small considerations as good or bad seasons. He had that within him which whispered that wherever the English language was spoken there must be an audience able to comprehend and admire his rendering of Hamlet and Romeo, Master Walter and Claude Melnotte, Alfred Evelyn, Charles Surface, John Mildmay, Citizen Sangfroid, Miles na Coppaleen, Sir Charles Coldstream, and Paul Pry.

In *these* few characters Mr. de Mortemar (*né* Morris) felt himself unapproachable. Other provincial stars might pretend to a wider range of character; the modest De Mortemar only sought to surpass a Kean in Hamlet, a Gustavus Brooke in Master Walter, a Macready in Lear, a Charles Mathews in Coldstream, a Wigan in John Mildmay, a Boucicault in the faithful Miles, and a Wright in the inquisitive

Paul. This much he felt that he could do, and he had no greedy desire to outstep the limit which liberal Nature had set upon his genius.

"I played a burlesque character of Robson's for my benefit at Market Deeping last year," Mr. de Mortemar remarked to a friend at the little tavern next door to the Oxford Road Theatre; "and the *Deeping Examiner* said that if it were possible I could excel in anything where all was excellence, I did excel in burlesque. But I don't care to make my mark in London as a burlesque actor. A man can't help it if Nature made him versatile, you see, Tommy; but there's some kind of principle in these things, and what Edmund Kean wouldn't have done, I won't do. That's my principle, and I mean to stick to it."

"And so I would, Morty, if I was you. Whatever Teddy Kean could do, you can do," replied the humble Pylades. "And I'll take another glass of bitter, if you'll stand Sam."

"I *have* played clown for my ben," murmured

the great De Mortemar; "but, though I drew an enormous house, I felt the injury to my self-respect was poorly paid for by a clear half."

"There ain't nothing you can't do, Morty, from Shylock to a flipflap. That ale's uncommon hard; I think a six of brandy-and-water warm would do you more good, and wouldn't hurt *me*."

And thus the simple De Mortemar discoursed of the greatness that was in him, while the scantily furnished benches of pit and gallery attested the badness of the season.

"They haven't heard of me yet," said the star, serene even in the hour of disappointment. "London is a large place, and a man can't get a reputation in a week. The metropolitan papers are slow, sir—very slow—to a man who has been accustomed to see a column and a half of criticism written upon every new character performed by him; but they can't afford to leave me unnoticed much longer; and when they do speak, they'll speak out, depend upon it. I look upon the Oxford Road Theatre as a

stepping-stone to Drury Lane, and it was with that view I took it."

Mr. de Mortemar had engaged Miss St. Albans for the heroines of those dramas and comedies in which he intended to shine, not because he believed in her talent—for in plain truth this great man believed in the existence of no talent except his own—but because she was very young and inexperienced, and he could do as he liked with her; which means, in a dramatic sense, that he could keep her with her back to the audience, in an ignominious corner of the stage, through the greater part of a scene, while he shouted and ranted at her from the centre of the boards; and that he could take her up so sharply at the end of her most telling speeches as to deprive her of that just meed of applause an approving audience might naturally have bestowed upon her, and in bestowing which they would have divided that coronal of glory Mr. de Mortemar desired to obtain for himself alone.

Mr. Desmond found that portion of the

boxes playfully entitled the dress-circle in occupation of two young women in scarlet Garibaldi jackets and black velvet head-dresses; one fat elderly lady, in a cap which offered to the eye of the observer a small museum of natural and artistic curiosities in the way of shells, feathers, beads, butterflies, and berries; three warm-looking young men, sprawling and lounging and giggling and whispering amongst themselves in a corner box; and a scanty sprinkling of that class of spectators who come with free admissions, and rarely come prepared for the removal of their bonnets, which removal being rigorously exacted, leaves them wild and haggard of aspect and soured in temper.

Amongst this audience the editor of the *Areopagus* meekly took his place, and prepared to await the rising of the curtain, while a subdued crunching of apples and sucking of oranges, mingled with a chorus of sibilant whisperings, went on round and about him.

Why, in a poorly-filled house, there should always be dispiriting and aggravating delays

between the falling and the rising of the act-drop, unknown to a well-attended theatre, is one of the enigmas of theatrical existence only to be solved by the masters of the craft; but it is indisputable that a scanty audience, naturally disposed to be captious and low-spirited, is always rendered more dismal and more captious by heart-sickening intervals of waiting, that would spoil the pleasure of an evening with Edmund Kean, or Charles Mathews, but which, when endured for the sake of a De Mortemar, are exasperating in the highest degree.

During such an interval, Laurence Desmond waited with tolerable patience, entertained by the most hackneyed of waltzes and polkas, performed by a feeble orchestra, before the curtain rose for the third act of the *Lady of Lyons*. The flabby act-drop, with its faded picture, did at last ascend, and, after a little preliminary skirmishing, Miss St. Albans appeared, conducted by the great De Mortemar, who wore a long black cloak, and looked unutterable things at the gallery with his solemn eyes, the dark-

ness whereof was intensified by very palpable half-circles of Indian ink. Miss St. Albans had very little to do in this scene. She had only to appear bewildered, and a little alarmed by the grinning landlord and servants, and very much in love with her prince. If she had any difficulty in giving expression to such simple sentiments, Mr. De Mortemar saved her from the exhibition of her incompetency, for he contrived to keep her back to the audience throughout the scene, and so stifled and smothered her against his manly breast, that all Mr. Desmond could see of his tutor's daughter was a slender girlish figure robed in white, and a fair head half concealed by the stiff curve of Mr. de Mortemar's encircling arm.

The first scene was short and unimportant; and after it came the cottage-scene—the great scene for Pauline—in which the merchant's haughty daughter finds that her Italian prince is only a self-educated gardener's son, with a mother in a white apron.

Mr. Desmond set himself to watch this scene

with a critical eye, for he wished to discover what hope of dramatic success there might be for his old friend's daughter. Well, she was a very pretty, winning girl, and she spoke her lines in a low soft voice, and with a gentle accent which stamped her as of different breeding from the people who acted with her, but—but she was not a genius; or if in her soul there was by chance some spark of the divine fire, it was choked and obscured by the smoke of her surroundings, and had yet to kindle into flame. She spoke her pretty poetical speeches, and wept, and trembled, and covered her face at the right moment; but she was only a timid young actress trying to act. She was not the Demoiselle Deschappelles—proud, loving, passionate, and maddened by the cheat that had been put upon her. The supreme exaltation of mind, the positive intoxication of the intellect, which constitutes great acting, had not yet come to her. She was timid, self-conscious, nervously anxious to please her audience, and secure the reward of a little hand-clapping and

feet-stamping from pit and gallery, when she should have been stung almost to madness by the sense of outraged faith and love abused, as unconscious of spectators as Ariadne at Naxos, or Dido on her funeral pyre.

But if Miss St. Albans was not yet an actress, it is to be remembered that she was only nineteen years of age, and had had little more than a twelvemonth's experience or practice of an art which is perhaps amongst the most difficult and exacting of all arts, and which has no formulæ whereby the student may arrive at some comprehension of its mysteries. It is an art that is rarely taught well, and very often taught badly; an art which demands from its professors a moral courage, and an expenditure of physical energy, intellectual power, and emotional feeling demanded by no other art; and when a man happens to be endowed with those many gifts necessary to perfection in this art, he is spoken of in a patronizing tone as "only an actor;" and it is somewhat a matter of wonder that he should be "received in society."

"She is very young," thought Mr. Desmond, when the act-drop had fallen on Pauline's passion and Claude's remorse, and when the star had been recalled by three particular friends in the pit, and one shrill boy in the gallery. "She is very young, and she is pretty and interesting, and might learn to be a good actress, if there were any school in which she could be taught. But to act with such a conventional ranter and tearer as this De Mortemar, would be destruction to an embryo Siddons. This girl seems eminently sympathetic, and is of the stuff that makes our Faucits and Herberts; but where is she to get the right training?—that is the question.

Mr. Desmond kept his place patiently throughout the third and fourth acts of the drama, though the dreary blank between the two acts was a sharp test of man's capacity for suffering. He saw Pauline come downstairs to breakfast, in her smart bridal-dress of lace and satin, to go through all those phases of pride and anger,

tenderness and yielding love, which form the crucial test of the young tragédienne's power and genius; and after the curtain had fallen upon Pauline, the subjugated and devoted, Laurence Desmond left the apple-munchers, and whisperers, and gigglers of the dress-boxes to their own devices, and departed, with the intention of penetrating to those mysterious regions which lie behind the boundary-line of the foot-lights.

To an ordinary individual the stage-door of the Oxford Road Theatre might have been an impassable barrier; but the name of the *Areopagus* was an "open sesame," against which no stage-door keeper could afford to shut his eyes. The stage-door keeper was not a reader of the popular literary journal, but he had a vague notion that the *Areopagus* was a paper affected by swells, and that it sometimes came down heavily upon the great ones of the dramatic world, whose genius no meaner organ dared gainsay. To the editor of such a periodical, Mr. de Mortemar would, of course, desire to be

civil; and the door-keeper admitted Mr. Desmond, after having submitted him to a sharp scrutiny, or, in his own phraseology, "taken stock of him, to make sure as he was none of them milingtary coves a-tryin' it on to git behind, and hang about the place a-talking to Mamsell Pasdebasque, which she ought to know better."

Mr. Desmond had never before been behind the scenes of the Oxford Road Theatre, but he had run the gauntlet of the West-end houses; and except that the passages and stairs in the Oxford Road Theatre were a shade or so darker, and dingier, and dirtier, and a little more eminently adapted for the spraining of ankles and the breaking of necks, the Oxford Road was as other theatres.

After some groping and stumbling in the wrong passages and on the wrong stairs, the Editor made his way to the green-room. He could scarcely have told himself why he took this trouble in order to say a few kind words to his old tutor's daughter, or whether the saying of

kind words was at all required from him. It may be that, having given up his evening to this visit to the Oxford Road Theatre, he came behind the scenes merely because he could no longer endure the dreary misery of the boxes; or it may be that he wanted to observe the manners and customs of actors of a different class from those he had been accustomed to meet. Mr. Desmond, however, did not trouble himself with any consideration of his motive. He came to the green-room to see Miss Alford, or Miss St. Albans, because it was the humour of the moment to come. He had given himself an evening's holiday from the ever-alternating labours of literary and social life, and he was not sorry to lose the sense of his own cares and perplexities amongst strange surroundings.

The green-room was a long narrow slip of a room underground, furnished with a few shabby chairs and benches, some flaring gas-lamps, and a cheval-glass, before which the actors and actresses contemplated themselves afresh after

every change of costume, more or less pleased with the result of their scrutiny.

Mr. Desmond found his friend's daughter standing before this glass, arranging the scanty festoons of a black tulle ball-dress, dotted about with little bunches of violets—a dress that Mademoiselle Deschappelles could by no possibility have worn at any period of her existence, but which poor Lucy Alford fondly believed was the exact thing for the last act.

"How do you do, once more, Miss—St. Albans?" said the editor, going up to the glass.

"How do you do, Mr. Desmond?" the girl said, startled, and blushing brightly beneath the artificial pallor which marked the mental agonies of Pauline. "I—I didn't think you'd come behind; it's not generally allowed, you know; but of course with you it's different. I saw you in the dress-circle. How kind of you to come! But it made me so nervous."

"Yes, I could see that you were nervous."

"You could see it! I am sorry for that!" said Lucy, just a little mortified.

"My dear young lady, if you were not nervous, you would not be of the sensitive stuff that makes an artist.

"You—you were not displeased with me?"

What could he say when she asked this question?—in faltering, pleading tones, that seemed to say, "Oh! for pity's sake, give me a word of praise, or I shall die at your feet." What could he say, when the soft blue eyes looked up to him with such a beseeching expression? Could he be candid, and reply, "You are at present the kind of actress whom the coarse-minded critic calls 'a stick;' your idea of Pauline Deschappelles is a schoolgirl's notion, without force, or depth, or passion; but when you are ten years older, and have thought, and suffered, and studied, and have lost all the youthful beauty which now enables you to look the part, you may possibly be able to act it?"

Instead of this, Mr. Desmond fenced the question with diplomatic art.

"It gave me great pleasure to see you act," he said; "and you looked charming. I think

fortune is a great deal too kind to Claude in giving him such a lovely and devoted wife after his shabby conduct."

"Do you like Mr. de Mortemar?" asked Lucy, delighted by the small meed of praise conveyed in this artful speech.

"Well, not very much," replied Laurence, smiling; "he is not exactly my style."

"And yet he was such an enormous favourite at Market Deeping," said Lucy, opening her eyes to their widest extent. "But, to tell you the real truth, I do not very much admire him myself; only I wouldn't say so to any one except you for the world, as it was so very good of him to give me a London engagement."

"It is not very good of him to keep you in a corner of the stage all through your best scenes."

"Yes, that is a disagreeable way he has; but I don't think he knows when he does it."

"Oh yes, my dear Miss St. Albans, depend upon it he knows very well. Ah, here he is."

Mr. de Mortemar entered the green-room with his grandest tragedy stalk. He had been informed of Mr. Desmond's visit."

"They have heard of me already," he said to himself. "Perhaps the *Areopagus* will be the first to speak out. I knew they couldn't afford to continue their vile attempt to crush me by silence. They have been paid—bribed by some London actors whose names I could mention—to keep my fame from the public. But there must come a time when they will find it dangerous for their own reputation to play that game any longer. They attempted to crush Kean, and they are attempting to crush me. But they will find it even harder work to destroy me than they found it to destroy poor little Ted."

This is what Mr. De Mortemar told his friends, whom he rarely entertained with any other topic than his own triumphs, past, present, and future; and this is what he told himself. Impressed with this conviction, he approached Mr. Desmond, and introduced himself

to that gentleman with the air of a man who confers a favour, and who is fully aware of the fact.

"I saw you in the boxes during the third and fourth acts," he said, in his grand, high-tragedy manner. "You could scarcely have chosen your time better for forming a fair judgment of my Claude. I do not consider it one of my *great* parts, though my friends are pleased to tell me that I have left William Charles Macready some distance behind in my rendering of that character. You were, no doubt, struck by some points which are not only new to the stage, but which go a step or two beyond the original meaning of the author. As, for instance, at the close of the third act, where, instead of the ordinary, 'Ho, my mother!'—a mere commonplace summons to a parent who is desired to come downstairs—I have adopted the heavy sigh of despair: 'Oh, my mother!'—expressive of Claude's remorseful consciousness that he has disregarded the widow's very sensible advice in the first act.

This reading opens up—if I may be permitted to say so—long vistas of thought, and also gives an importance and an elevation to the character of the Widow Melnotte, for which the lady performing that part can scarcely be sufficiently grateful. 'Oh, my mother! Oh, my second self, my guide, my counsellor, by whose sustaining wisdom I might have escaped my present degradation and despair!' All that, I flatter myself, is implied in the sigh and the gesture which I introduce at this point. Subtle, is it not?"

"Extremely subtle," said Laurence; "you must have studied the German critics, Mr. de Mortemar? There is a profundity in your ideas that reminds me of Schlegel."

"No, sir; I have studied *this*," replied the tragedian, thumping the breast of his green-cloth coat, whereon glittered the tin-foil crosses and spangled stars which the soldier of the Republic was supposed to have won for himself in Italy. "I have drawn my inspiration from my own heart, sir; and I am the less surprised

when I find that the fire that burns *here* is quick to kindle an electric spark in the breasts of other men. The people of Market Deeping will tell you who and what I am, sir, if you can take the trouble to interrogate them. There are some there, sir, who know what good acting is, and who know how to appreciate a great actor. In London, you seem not to want great actors. The age of your Garricks and your Kembles is past; and when new Garricks and Kembles arise, you shut the doors of your principal theatres in their faces, and do your best to ignore them, or to write them down in your newspapers. But this kind of thing cannot last for ever, sir. The voice of the mighty British public is clamorous for a great actor; and you, sir, garble and misrepresent the truth as you may, cannot long interpose yourself between that mighty public and that great actor. I am, of course, understood to speak in a broad and general sense, sir, and to mean no offence to you in person."

"Of course not. I shall accept all you say

in a strictly parliamentary sense, as the Pickwickians did upon a memorable occasion. And believe me, Mr. de Mortemar, when Garrick *redivivus* appears, mine shall not be the pen to dispute his genius. In the meantime the public must be content with—ah, you are called, I see, Mr. de Mortemar."

A grimy-faced boy summoned the hero of the night, and the great De Mortemar was compelled to depart before he had extorted from the editor of the *Areopagus* the smallest modicum of that praise for which his soul hungered.

Mr. Desmond did not find himself alone with Miss St. Albans on the departure of Mr. De Mortemar. An elderly and bloated individual, in a very shabby gray suit of the Georgian era, hovered near, and surveyed the stranger ever and anon with an observant eye—an eye in which there was that watery lustre, by some physiologists supposed to betoken a partiality for strong drinks. Mr. Desmond remembered this gentleman as the parent of Pauline, and

perceived in his shabby and faded appearance the decadence of the wealthy merchant of Lyons.

"That's rather a strong case of coals, a'nt it?" inquired this individual, indicating by a turn of his head that the departing De Mortemar was the subject of his discourse.

"A case of coals?" repeated Laurence, doubtfully.

"Yes, coals—nuts—barcelonas. The gorger's awful coally on his own slumming, eh?"

"I really am at a loss—" faltered the bewildered Laurence."

"Don't understand our patter, I suppose," said M. Deschappelles, with an affable smile. "I mean to say that our friend the manager is rather sweet upon his own acting."

"Well, yes; Mr. De Mortemar appears to have considerable confidence in his own powers."

"Rather! Bless your heart, they're always coming up to London like that, thinking they're going to set the town in a blaze. There was William Harford—Howling Billy, they used to call him on the Northern Circuit—he came to

London thinking he was going to put Macready's nose out of joint—and didn't. He was a wicked actor, he was. Satan will have him some day. A man can't go on murdering Shakspeare as Howling Billy did without coming to Satan at last.

"P'line! Deechappells!—Miss St. Albans! Mr. Jackson!—last scene!" roared the grimy-faced boy at this juncture, and Mr. Desmond was fain to bid his tutor's daughter a brief good-night.

He did not return to the front of the house. He had seen enough of Miss Alford's acting to enable him to judge very fairly what she could do in the present, and what she might achieve in the future.

"I will try my best to get her out of this wretched school," he said to himself. "I will try to get her away from Mr. de Mortemar and that curious, good-tempered-looking old man, who talked about Satan and Howling Billy. I dare say I can get Hartstone to engage her for the Pall Mall. He wants pretty, lady-like girls

for his farces, and gives very liberal salaries; and though she won't get the experience that makes a Helen Faucit, she will at any rate get away from the De Mortemar school. I should like to put her in the right path, for poor old Alford's sake."

END OF VOL. I.

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